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THE QUEST FOR PROFESSIONALIZATION: A TWENTIETH CENTURY CAUTIONARY
TALE FOR UNITED STATES STAGE MANAGERS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores stage management's failed attempts at professionalization in the early twentieth century. Using Harold L. Wilensky's theory of professionalization as a means of comparison, I investigate the ways stage management tried to develop as a field of practice but were ultimately thwarted from professionalizing. Wilensky developed his theory in the 1960s investigating the paths of five professionalized occupations between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Likewise, I examine stage management's attempts at professionalization in the same period. However, Wilensky's theory is problematic because it reinforces systemic racism structures. Because of this, my dissertation concludes by interrogating Wilensky's theory to develop a more equitable professionalization process.

Between 1870 and 1980, the stage management community used the publishing process to define and redefine stage management, which is the first step toward professionalization in Wilensky's theory. An analysis of these stage management handbooks reveals that the labor and titles attributed to stage management shifted from directorial tasks to technical direction to contemporary stage management between 1900 and 1950, making it difficult to pinpoint the exact labor of the stage manager. The analysis also reveals that due to the scattershot and incomplete nature of publishing on the field and its practices, stage management was unable to engage in a field-wide, coherent conversation advocating for a specific definition and set of standards, which ultimately prevented the field's professionalization.

In the 1940s, the stage management community turned to the field's professional organization, Actors' Equity Association (AEA), to arbitrate professionalization. AEA records and stage management documents demonstrate the ways the field attempted to achieve

professionalization and the ways AEA resisted such changes, maintaining that stage managers were actors with additional responsibilities. The inability to fully advocate for stage managers rights through AEA has delayed the professionalization of the field, leaving members of the profession frustrated.

The lack of perceived professionalization continues to contribute to the marginalization of stage managers and threatens the safety and success of all theatre workers. This dissertation demonstrates why there has been resistance to the professionalization of stage management historically and how past practices continue to restrict the field. The dissertation concludes by mapping out significant conversations that the stage management community must have to achieve an anti-racist professionalization process. This includes, but is not limited to, ways that stage managers must restructure the field, training programs, and standard practices to create a more equitable field.

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*For supporting and encouraging me on every step of this journey,
I love you.*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: DEFINING STAGE MANAGEMENT: A STUDY IN CO-OCCURRENCES	34
CHAPTER 2: STAGE MANAGER AS ACTOR: A PROBLEMATIC ORIGIN STORY	82
CHAPTER 3: STAGE MANAGERS' ASSOCIATION: A FLAWED TURNING POINT	117
CHAPTER 4: A CODA: NOW WHAT? WHERE STAGE MANAGERS NEED TO GO	155
CONCLUSION.....	190
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	193
APPENDIX A: LIST OF STAGE MANAGEMENT HANDBOOKS, 1870-1980	202
APPENDIX B: STAGE MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK SPREADSHEETS	204
APPENDIX C: WE COMMIT TO ANTI-RACIST STAGE MANAGEMENT EDUCATION	216
APPENDIX D: HOLD PLEASE: ADDRESSING URGENCY AND OTHER WHITE SUPREMACIST STANDARDS IN STAGE MANAGEMENT	220
APPENDIX E: STAGE MANAGEMENT ACTION ITEMS	225

INTRODUCTION

When I set out to write this dissertation several years ago, I intended to chart the history of stage management as a distinct field in the United States from its earliest practices to 1950. I collected and carefully scrutinized data from promptbooks and archives to document and map the shifts in the field as it was practiced and taught. This history, I knew, could serve as a guide to our field for understanding our current debates and practices, especially around professionalization. Then, in March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic shook the world, the theatre, and the field. As archives and theatres shut down, new debates and conversations arose from a swift shift to digital theatre making and the Black Lives Matter movement. The pandemic brought into focus an urgent need to reshape, re-contextualize, and address the current state of the field and its efforts to professionalize. This dissertation, therefore, charts the earliest history of the field but also captures the marked shifts and conversations around equity, diversity, and inclusion that became central amidst the pandemic. While I might have continued the study as planned, it seemed unethical to leave the current moment untreated. The organization of the study, therefore, shifted. The first chapters document the practices of the field and the early efforts of American stage managers to professionalize. The final chapter, more theoretical in nature, proposes strategies for addressing the current state of the field as it seeks recognition and stability while improving access and equity. As a whole, the dissertation provides contemporary stage managers with an understanding of the ongoing work of stage managers to clarify their labor, negotiate reasonable contracts, and improve the working environment.

Professionalization is the process undertaken by occupations to be publicly recognized as professions, usually by meeting certain criteria. Using stage management handbooks and Actors'

Equity Association (AEA) archival records, I explore the ways that stage management attempted to professionalize. In AEA records, the union repeatedly associates stage managers with “actors with additional responsibilities” rather than acknowledging that they were representative of a separate, long-standing field. This perspective blocked stage management-specific policies because AEA reasoned that these requests would cause a rift amongst actors. Records from the AEA archive combined with stage management documents expose how the field’s perception and attempts at professionalization were repeatedly interrupted and altered. As a professional union stage manager with a Masters of Fine Arts degree in stage management,¹ I am well-placed to explain and analyze the field’s failures, successes, and current challenges. In some cases, I draw on my personal experience, but must keep companies and details anonymous to protect the individuals and organizations referenced. By comparing the historical demands of stage managers to the current challenges facing the field, the investigation shows how the stage managers have a long history of advocacy, adaptability, and desire to improve their working conditions for the welfare of all theatre makers. It demonstrates that the field has always been in flux as stage managers have sought to define and amplify their work.

AEA’s inaugural national convention, which took place in April 2021, provides further evidence of stage management’s need and desire to professionalize as well as the theatrical field’s attempts at rectifying EDI concerns. Convention delegates submitted over one hundred resolutions, which were condensed to eighty proposals before the convention’s start date. Of the eighty resolutions, fifty-one proposals were heard and debated and forty-four of those were approved and published in a press release.² Eight of the forty-four proposals addressed

¹ Strictly speaking, my MFA is in “Theatre Arts” with an emphasis in “Stage Management.”

² Rashaan James II on Council, “Actors’ Equity Association held our first ever National Convention from Sunday to Tuesday.” Facebook, April 28, 2021.

https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=4073861249323725&id=1078982198811660&ref=page_internal.

negotiating concerns of stage managers and recommended that the union change its name and contractual language to be more equitable and inclusive for stage managers. Twelve resolutions focused on addressing equity and justice for all AEA union members regardless of nationality, race, gender, sexual orientation, including resolutions to remove membership restrictions for international artists and stage managers, institute harassment training, and address racism within the union and the workplace. An additional five resolutions addressed EDI and stage management concerns including preventing unpaid internships, implementing job sharing programs, and eliminating six-day workweeks.³ These resolutions underscore the field's professional development, the importance of EDI in stage management, and the urgency of my study of historical stage management.

Finding a definition that truly encompasses the stage manager's role in contemporary theatre is challenging to find, as discussed in chapter one. For this reason, the convention resolution titled, "In Support of Stage Managers" called on the union to educate membership and producers on the role of stage managers in theatrical productions, as stage management is often misunderstood as a catchall. The contemporary theatrical stage manager takes over the production after the director leaves on opening night, giving notes and filling out reports to ensure that the performance is the same on a nightly basis, true to the director's vision. To best complete this task, it is imperative that the stage management team takes copious notes during the rehearsal process, recording the actors' movements in the production's promptbook. The stage management team is also responsible for the creation, upkeep and dissemination of information and charts that pertain to the running of the show and acting as the primary communication hub for the production. Stage managers use a variety of tools and techniques to

³ "AEA Convention Press Release," Actors' Equity Association, accessed June 19, 2021, <https://www.actorsequity.org/news/PR/FirstConventionConclusion/>.

keep communication channels open. During the performance itself, the stage management team serves as the brain of the show, calling the lighting, sound, and shift cues that keep the show moving from one scene to the next. In the event of an emergency, the stage manager assists in problem solving and assesses whether or not the show can or should continue and, if possible, offers solutions for getting the show back on track. This brief description of the stage manager's labor only touches on the major facets of stage management, but it is easy to see why and how stage managers are asked to complete tasks that would traditionally not be under their jurisdiction. In order to protect stage managers from continued and future misuse and abuse, the union must build a stage management definition into its collective bargaining agreements that will provide boundaries to ensure healthy work/life balance and educate producers and theatrical practitioners alike on the exact jurisdiction of the AEA stage manager.

Theatre has traditionally been understood as a vocation; actors, designers, directors, stage managers, and technicians are assumed to be practicing their skills "for love," rather than pursuing a profession. Therefore, all theatre makers are subject to exploitation and misuse. This is particularly true for stage managers: their work is often minimized, overlooked, and disregarded because much of the stage manager's labor doesn't take place within the rehearsal. In spite of this devaluation, stage managers are expected to be available 24/7 during the production process, making work/life boundaries unmanageable.⁴ The urgency to be available is driven by the concern that stage managers can be easily replaced if they refuse or cause trouble. Stage managers and many others, especially those with care-giving responsibilities, struggle

⁴ Stephanie Elliot, "Anyone else struggle with the family juggling act?" post on Year of the Stage Manager 2020/21 on Facebook, April 2, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/709114496283521/posts/1028018397726461/>.

between the demands of the profession and being an active care-giver.⁵ As a result, there is an impression in the field that stage managers, especially women, must choose between their careers and their families. Balancing between work and life is difficult as stage managers log long hours throughout the production process.

Regular rehearsals are scheduled for eight hours out of ten, mostly during irregular business hours and stage managers are expected to be the first to arrive and the last to leave.⁶ During tech week, stage managers arrive several hours before and stay at least an hour after the scheduled rehearsal to meet with the production team and go over the goals and needs of the following day. This means it is not abnormal for stage managers to be at the theatre for 16-20 hours on tech days. Since AEA is centered around actors' experience, the actors are only called for ten hours of tech rehearsal, while the stage manager is expected to be there for almost double the time. The AEA convention resolution titled "Stage Management Negotiation Concerns" outlines several recommendations for how to prioritize the stage managers during the development of new contracts, as well as during contract negotiations because stage management's marginality within the union and the political entanglements involved in the negotiating process have stopped AEA from negotiating for better working conditions for stage managers.⁷ The recent AEA convention also included four resolutions that asked for the elimination of the 10-out-of-12-hour rehearsal day and the six-day workweek, for the five-show weekend to be reduced, the creation of financial support dedicated to caregiving members, and

⁵ Rachel Spencer Hewitt "Work/Life Balance Is Everyone's Urgent Business Now." *American Theatre Magazine*. March 30, 2020. https://www.americantheatre.org/2020/03/30/work-life-balance-is-everyones-urgent-business-now/?fbclid=IwARIGDUfHoABLY0VAV5to86UWTzurLaziWuOroF6s2vF17djKjWa_L7PZpxU.

⁶ Some theatres do not conduct their rehearsals during standard business hours (9am-5pm), in many cases these rehearsals are held 10am-8pm or 12pm-10pm, Lawrence Stern, *Stage Management A Guidebook of Practical Techniques*, (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1974.)

⁷ AEA Convention.

the implementation of a job share program to allow members to share stage or stage management tracks and contracts.⁸ If fulfilled by the AEA Executive Council, these resolutions would benefit stage managers and actors alike, as well as providing opportunities for greater equity and diversity on and off stage.

Without the prestige and reputation associated with achieving professionalization, stage managers will continue being devalued and exploited. Even something as basic as what should count as “rehearsal hours” is controversial in the stage management field. In stage management forums, members ask if production meetings, paperwork creation and other tasks count towards the approved weekly hours or if this labor should count towards overtime.⁹ Many stage managers argue that certain tasks should be included, but because of the uncertainty and lack of clarity around overtime, stage managers are uncertain of how to proceed. Producers assume that those tasks are included in the salary being paid and, therefore, disagree when confronted with overtime bills. As written by Bailey Howard in a public stage management Facebook group, “I am still early in my career, but in the even earlier days, I was afraid, still am to an extent, that if I did not perform every task set to me perfectly and without complaint then I would not be hired again or even out right fired.”¹⁰ This comment was written on a thread about claiming overtime. The continued fear of being replaced and the lack of anonymity when a stage management issue is reported to AEA means that some stage managers are willing to stick to the approved salary and leave overtime unreported. This confusion about and lack of standardization of overtime

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ @phillydan, “When do you claim overtime?” post on SMNetwork.org, September 16, 2004, <https://smnetwork.org/forum/the-hardline/when-do-you-claim-overtime/>;

¹⁰ Bailey Howard, “I had to talk with my producers this week because I’m dangerously close to overtime. The hill I will die on: always claim your overtime,” Post on Year of the Stage Manager 2020/21 on Facebook, January 21, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/709114496283521/permalink/72047778480526>.

allows producers to continue to set the terms of employment, taking advantage of the situation and exploiting the stage manager for additional time, energy and labor.

In addition, stage managers are rarely provided understudy coverage during the production run. Stage managers often have to choose between any pre-scheduled conflicts such as family events and medical procedures and the contract. Producers treat ASMs as the default understudy coverage when they do not provide an understudy dedicated to stage management tracks. ASMs have their own responsibilities during rehearsal and performance including overseeing the backstage area and dealing with unexpected challenges, making it impossible to safely and efficiently perform the stage manager's calling track simultaneously with the assistant stage manager's backstage track. This lack of coverage for the stage management team results in a mentality that stage managers do not deserve sick days. Public stage management Facebook groups are full of stories of stage managers working whilst sick or injured.¹¹ At the same time, producers refuse to properly budget for the hours worked by a stage manager. In fact, many regional theatres refuse to consider out-of-town stage managers because they are considered not worth the housing expenses, usually noted on the AEA portal with, "Local area stage managers are encouraged to submit."¹² Or, the company will suggest a work-around, offering a contract but only on a "local-hire" basis so that the company does not have to provide them with housing.

¹¹ Kristin Dwyer, "This came up tangential to today's panel on setting time boundaries - the culture around the SM being indispensable/irreplaceable..." Post on Year of the Stage Manager 2020/2021 on Facebook, January 20, 2021 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/709114496283521/permalink/988614685000166>.

¹² Boston Playwright's Theatre 2021-22, "Stage Manager Job Notices," Actors' Equity Association, posted June 16, 2021, accessed June 19, 2021, <https://members.actorssequity.org/castingcall/search/jobdetail/?NoticeID=198c84c7-eccd-eb11-a836-002248202b63&ref=stagemanagers>; Lyric Stage Company 2021-2022 Season, "Stage Manager Job Notices," Actors' Equity Association, posted June 11, 2021, accessed June 19, 2021; <https://members.actorssequity.org/castingcall/search/jobdetail/?NoticeID=8a4b88a4-06bf-eb11-a836-002248202b63&ref=stagemanagers>; Aurora Theatre Company 2021-2022 Season, "Stage Manager Job Notices," Actors' Equity Association, posted May 25, 2021, accessed June 19, 2021, <https://members.actorssequity.org/castingcall/search/jobdetail/?NoticeID=584f7e72-96bd-eb11-a836-002248202b63&ref=stagemanagers>.

The professionalization of stage management would provide multiple ways to protect the field and those who work in it. These protections could include minimizing the work day and/or work week as has been suggested by the grassroots campaign “No-more-10-out-of-12” and *American Theatre* magazine.¹³ Other safeguards could include a formal definition with a definite set of tasks that when performed outside of rehearsal hours results in overtime. Instituting coverage for stage managers would allow them the same access to sick days and vacation days that other theatrical positions already enjoy. These actions would ultimately benefit both stage managers and actors because many of these items would create equity, clarity and transparency in the rehearsal process.

By professionalizing stage management, the theatrical field would be forced to confront all of the parts of our labor that are currently overlooked. In doing so, the field could establish better boundaries which would inherently benefit all union members, especially those that identify as underrepresented or underserved. Professionalization could also create better pathways for documenting and reporting problems faced by stage managers. The outcome could create better protections for stage managers against retribution. Unlike actors who can report problems to the deputy and enjoy a fair amount of anonymity, if the stage manager turns to the union for assistance on stage management matters, the producer is almost guaranteed to know who reported the problem. For example, in many of the AEA contracts there are additional duties that a stage manager can perform, provided that they sign a rider to that effect, and are compensated for the additional labor. Some of those tasks could include operating the lighting/sound board during the performance run, laundry after the performance, etc. Many

¹³ “Welcome to: No More 10 Out of 12s,” accessed January 2021, <https://nomore10outof12s.com>; Jerald Raymond Pierce, “Time for a Change: What If We Cut the Long Hours?” *American Theatre Magazine*, Published 20 August 2020, <https://www.americantheatre.org/2020/08/20/time-for-a-change-what-if-we-cut-the-long-hours/>.

producers assume that the stage manager will automatically operate the lighting/sound boards without a rider or additional compensation, arguing that previous stage managers have done so.¹⁴ As noted by several concerned participants in the public Facebook page, stage managers “can refuse to press that button but what do you tell them during the interview when they say, ‘we expect our stage managers to run the lights and sound?’ ‘For an additional fee, I will.’ And then they go with someone else who will do it without that fee.”¹⁵ If the stage manager chose to push-back on this requirement, the company may decide to offer the contract to a different stage manager, one who was willing to run the board without additional compensation. Or if the stage manager chooses to turn to the union, the company can easily determine who complained and choose never to hire them again. Stage managers risk professional relationships and future employment when reporting their concerns. Professionalizing stage management would allow the field to create professional standards that would reinforce safety and structure. Once the field achieved professionalization, the theatre companies would be forced to recognize the efficiency and the economic benefits to hiring experienced stage managers in safe working conditions.

Among stage managers, there has been little organized resistance to efforts to professionalize. At most, some have accepted the status quo and have not actively agitated for improvements in the field. Notably, though, a handful have expressed resistance to professionalization on the grounds of enabling some fluidity among specializations or using stage management as a gateway into the field. Thomas Kelly, author of the field’s standard textbook, *The Backstage Guide to Stage Management*, noted in a public Facebook comment,

¹⁴ Amanda Spooner, “In the spirit of education, let’s talk about this job posting...” posted on Year of the Stage Manager 2020/21 on Facebook, January 17, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/709114496283521/permalink/717831758745128/>; Michael Friedlander, “Anyone see issues with the following...” posted on Year of the Stage Manager 2020/21 on Facebook, March 7, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/709114496283521/posts/751093078752329>.

¹⁵ Craig Matthew, comment on Friedlander’s post.

“Today I have no burning desire to be part of what often seems to me to be a normalization of things that once we fought against.”¹⁶ Kelly, and others, resist changing the status quo, arguing that these newer demands make, “the job somewhat unrecognizable.”¹⁷ Others may not want to professionalize because these individuals enjoy being theatre generalists and fear losing the flexibility to perform multiple roles if stage management professionalized.¹⁸ This study demonstrates, however, that over time, an increasing number of stage management practitioners have supported securing the field through professionalization.

To ensure that the production process runs smoothly with transparency and efficiency, I argue and reiterate the concerns of AEA members in the recent proposals, qualified stage managers and assistant stage managers should be required for every production. In some cases, producers put administration on the stage management contract in order to save a few dollars on health insurance. In early 2020, AEA and Equity League Benefit Funds filed insurance fraud claims against Gateway Playhouse. In turn, Gateway Playhouse sued AEA asserting that the insurance fraud claim that AEA filed was unfair, to which AEA filed a motion to dismiss the lawsuit and included detailed descriptions of several instances when Gateway Playhouse put staff members on AEA contracts, yet those staff members did not perform the duties mentioned on the AEA contract.¹⁹ In this case, the company hired a non-AEA stage manager to do the actual stage managing, while their staffer continued fulfilling their company position. In this case, AEA was able to take steps against the producers, but in other cases, the staffer will attempt to work

¹⁶ Old Joe Drummond and Thomas Kelly, “Has a press release type document been compiled for the Year of the Stage Manager to send to publications?” posted on Year of the Stage Manager 2020/21 on Facebook, January 29, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/709114496283521/posts/726150684579902>.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Amanda Spooner, “Why.” Posted on Year of the Stage Manager 2020/21 on Facebook, May 23, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/709114496283521/posts/1061312967730337>.

¹⁹ For more information see the motion to dismissal: Evan Hudson-Plush, Olivia R Singer, Cohen, Weiss and Simon LLP, “Memorandum of Law of Defendant Actors’ Equity Association in Support of Motion to Dismiss the Complaint,” (Civil Action No.: 2:20-cv-02531, New York, 2020).

double-time, completing their normal duties within the company while moonlighting as the stage manager. This means that the person responsible for the communication and dissemination of information is often unqualified and details may be missed and stressful situations compounded because of their inexperience. If the stage manager fails to pass on script cuts or design details, the production cast and crew may need to scramble to fix the situation, once these changes come to light. For example, if the production team and crew dedicated many hours to perfecting a particular design choice, but find out during technical rehearsal that the effect has been cut or changed, that will mean the shop has wasted precious hours, budget, and energy unnecessarily. In the end, the producers are making due with an inefficient hierarchy of theatre. These missteps inevitably cost the theatre company money in labor or supplies and justify the employment of a knowledgeable stage management team member. The stage manager is a vital position and with a competent and trained individual, the production process can be made smoother and calmer than it would be with an untrained person.

Achieving professionalization will protect procedural practices that ensure safety, effective communication, and fair labor practices in theatre making. Professionalization would require a clear definition of the field, along with the identification of tasks involved. Professionalization would also open up the possibility of membership qualifications to ensure that all AEA stage management contracts went to experienced AEA stage managers. Professionalization would spotlight ways to support stage managers working in the field.

While there has been increasing momentum to do so, the failure to successfully professionalize dates back to the 1940s when AEA leadership obstructed stage management's attempts to define and redefine the role of stage management as something other than "actor." In short, AEA refused to acknowledge the unique role stage managers play in the production

process. AEA denied the stage management field a proper place at the negotiating table for years and ultimately blocked their attempt at organizing in 1947 and 1981. And now, as demonstrated by the AEA convention regulations recently put forth, it is vital that the field of stage management finishes its elongated process of professionalization to ensure a more equitable and anti-racist future and the continuation of such an important role in U.S. theatre.

For the purposes of this dissertation, I use Harold L. Wilensky's work on professionalization because of its wide-spread influence on professionalization studies within organizational sociology. Much of the scholarly work on professionalization cites and refers to Wilensky's work as the origin for these studies. Wilensky's analysis of the process of professionalization is useful for demonstrating the ways stage management has failed to build its reputation and status within the theatrical field. I use Wilensky's theory of professionalization as a means of comparative analysis to evaluate significant historical stage management actions and as a template to assess what work needs to be done to reach some semblance of professionalization and equity.

Traditional routes to professionalization are problematic because their exclusionary structures inherently reinforce systemic racism; therefore, as I analyze approaches to professionalization, I remain mindful of highlighting activities that sustain racism and suggest alternative antiracist practices for professionalizing the field. There is still much antiracist work to be done, and exploring how professionalization effects working conditions and gatekeeping will indicate ways that the method can be restructured to create an anti-racist professionalization process. Therefore, after considering how stage management's attempts to professionalize have been systematically thwarted, I turn in the final chapter to a consideration of how the field might professionalize outside of Wilensky's models. This historical moment offers a tremendous

opportunity to not only reconsider how stage managers have struggled to raise their professional standing and negotiating power but also how their efforts might benefit EDI initiatives throughout the industry.

Wilensky, an organizational sociologist, researched and published articles about the process of professionalization in the 1960s. He argued that there was a particular process to professionalizing a field and that the more closely the field followed the pattern, the more likely it would reach the "ideal" state of professionalization.²⁰ Wilensky used lawyers, doctors and clergy to demonstrate true professionalization through each field's autonomous expertise and service ideal.²¹ These fields maintained a certain professionalized reputation because they took the following steps in a certain order. Wilensky, whose gendered language I note belies assumptions about masculinity and professionalization, describes this process here:

There is a typical process by which the established professions have arrived; men begin doing the work full time and stake out jurisdiction, the early masters of the technique or adherents of the movement become concerned about standards of training and practice and set up a training school, which if not lodged in universities at the outset, makes academic connection within two or three decades; the teachers and activists then achieve success in promoting more effective organization, first local then national – through either the transformation of an existing occupational association or the creation of a new one. Toward the end, legal protection of the monopoly of skill appears; at the end, a formal code of ethics is adopted.²²

²⁰ Harold L. Wilensky, "The Professionalization for Everyone?" *American Journal of Sociology*, 70, no. 2 (1964): 137-58. Accessed April 10, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/2775206.

²¹ *Ibid*, 137.

²² Wilensky, 145-146.

These five steps: 1.) establishment of a body of knowledge, 2.) forming a training program, 3.) founding a professional organization, 4.) creating a licensing/certification process, and 5.) agreeing upon a code of ethics to guide the field are paramount to the professionalization process. Once established, the field's professionalization can be bolstered through legal consequences for someone who attempts to practice the field without the necessary knowledge, training or licensing. The field can also establish legal consequences for professionals who break the code of ethics.

Herbert R. Northrup, A.M. Carr-Saunders and P.A. Wilson maintained that professionalization was antithetical to unionization because their membership, bargaining methodologies, and objectives were polar opposites.²³ Leslie B. Alexander, a contemporary social scientist, argued in her 1980 article on professionalization and unionization that these social scientists were judging unions and professional organizations by ideal stereotypes epitomized in historical literature rather than by the realities professional organizations, unions, and professional unions face. Alexander contends that Northrup's, Carr-Saunders' and Wilson's views fail "to account for the slow yet steady rate since the 1930s of unionization of professional workers of all types, including social workers, psychologists, lawyers, engineers, occupational therapists, and college professors."²⁴ She notes that this archaic view deliberately compares industrial unions, such as auto workers which epitomize union ideals, to professionalized fields, instead of craft unions, where the differences are less pronounced.²⁵

²³ Herbert Roof Northrup. *Unionization of Professional Engineers and Chemists*, (New York: Industrial relations counselors, Inc.) 1946; A. M. Carr-Saunders and P. A. Wilson. *The Professions*. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press) 1971.

²⁴ Leslie B. Alexander. "Professionalization and unionization: compatible after all?" *Social Work*, 25, no.6 (1980): 478. 16-05-2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23711678>, 476.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 476.

Unions typically reject those above a certain level in the organizational hierarchy—for example, those defined as management – whereas professional associations tend to exclude members on the basis of insufficient education or experience. For professionals who are union members, these exclusionary practices typically mean that eligibility for membership in their professional association is for their lifetime, whereas eligibility for union membership is short term, lasting only until the individual is promoted into management.²⁶

In AEA’s case, once membership is achieved, members are granted lifetime membership provided they continue to pay required dues and remain in good standing. For stage managers, this means that the field’s professionalization does not require separation from the union, and instead the field should use professionalized unions, like those representing college professors, nurses and social workers, as examples when arbitrating their professionalization.

Here, I take a closer look at each of these steps and highlight the ways stage management has achieved or failed each step. While Wilensky’s steps suggest a linear process toward professionalization, I challenge Wilensky on such a procession and will demonstrate how the process for stage management has flowed in a non-linear way toward professionalization. Wilensky’s division of the process of professionalization into stages nevertheless provides useful areas for comparative analysis.

The first step towards professionalization begins with literally doing the job necessary and recognizing the unique body of knowledge needed for a particular occupation. Wilensky writes, “An obvious first step is to start doing full time the thing that needs doing. The sick were always nursed, but technical and organizational developments created nursing as an

²⁶ Ibid, 477.

occupation... At this early stage, the practitioners come, of necessity, from other occupations.”²⁷ Stage management has had a long history in the Western theatre practice. The labor performed by the contemporary stage manager dates back to the fifteenth century. In the 1400s, monks held promptbooks and aided actors in their lines and cued movements and effects.²⁸ In the 1900s, stage managers and other theatrical practitioners began condensing the stage manager’s labor into a body of knowledge as books became more widely distributed. Over a hundred years later, stage managers are still creating the body of knowledge today, arguably because AEA has yet to formalize the definition of stage management. Instead, AEA’s tactic has been to highlight what stage managers are not allowed to do, rather than what they should do. Since AEA has failed to define stage management, the process of defining and redefining stage management and the creation of the body of knowledge has occurred through the publishing of handbooks.

One concern amongst stage managers is the loss of individuality in exchange for professionalization. Instead of defining and redefining the field of stage management, it has become status quo to keep the tasks and details as unregulated as possible to allow room for such independence. As noted in *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*:

Occupations choose the professionalization path to attain societal kudos, but, in doing so, their members agree to subject their own attitudes, skills and conduct to the discipline of verifiable expertise, collective rules and constraints. This aspect of professional status, the voluntary tempering of individuality, is a prerequisite to forging a professional identity, mission and core knowledge base that society can

²⁷ Wilensky, 142.

²⁸ W. J. Lawrence, *Old Theatre Days and Ways*, (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd. , 1935), 22-41.

recognize. If members of an occupation do not meet this challenge, their professional ambitions will not be realized.²⁹

Advocates for professionalization recognize that a part of the process will require restructuring the stage management field. And through that restructuring, some individuality within our field will be lost; however, there are deep gains to be made through the professionalization process.

The second step towards professionalization is the establishment of a training school.

Wilensky argues,

If these training schools do not begin within universities... they always eventually seek contact with universities and there is a steady development of standard terms of study, academic degrees, and research programs to expand the base of knowledge. Higher standards increase the length and cost of training and force earlier commitment among recruits. In the successful case, the standardized training is requisite to entering the occupation.³⁰

Wilensky points out that in four of the six established professions he studied university training programs appeared before national professional associations. Wilensky argues that this trend reveals how critical training programs are to the professionalization process because training programs must connect the knowledge of the field to the rationale for exclusive jurisdiction.³¹

The oldest theatre degree awarding program in the United States started in 1914 at Carnegie Institute of Technology, now known as Carnegie Mellon University. Stage management was one of the original required courses, although Dr. George Schwimmer argued in his 1985 dissertation that the course was practical, meaning students learned stage

²⁹ Michael Piggott, Barbara Reed, Frank Upward, *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*, (United Kingdom: Elsevier Science, 2005), 53.

³⁰ Wilensky, 144.

³¹ *Ibid*, 144.

management by stage managing one of the department's shows, rather than learning in a classroom setting.³² Stage managers are not required to enroll in college or graduate stage management programs before stage managing professionally. And, unlike medicine and law, BA, BFA and MFA stage management curriculums do not have a national mandated accreditation process.³³ In other words, not all stage managers learn stage management through formal education as dictated by the field's experts. In many smaller schools including California State University Los Angeles and Western Connecticut State University (WCSU), stage management courses are taught by non-stage management faculty members, whose expertise is often in technical directing, lighting design or other adjacent fields.³⁴ WCSU's website advertises a BA in Theatre Arts Management, making this stage management course a core class for conferral, yet does not have a professional stage manager on faculty.³⁵ Stage managers who choose to enroll in stage management classes may learn drastically different skills/policies/etc. than their peers in different schools. In addition, these stage managers may be taught outdated methods of stage managing that are no longer relevant in the professional field. These issues indicate deficiencies in the training of stage managers caused by the absence of a formal definition. Currently, the training process is unstructured and left entirely up to the program and program head to deem what knowledge is most important.³⁶ While this may not seem like a

³² George Schwimmer, Dissertation: "My Heart is in the Work: The Background and Inception of the First B.A. Program in Theatre," 1985, Box: 1, Folder: 15. Carnegie Mellon University Archives, 128.

³³ Instead of being accredited through a National Stage Management organization (as is the case for the medical and legal fields), these schools meet the standards created by the schools' accreditor. This means that the field has little authority over what should or should not be taught in higher education.

³⁴ "University Catalog," Cal State LA, accessed June 19, 2021, https://catalog.calstatela.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=66&poiid=30130; "Undergraduate Catalog 2020-2021: School of Visual and Performing Arts," Western Connecticut State University, accessed June 19, 2021, <https://catalogs.wcsu.edu/ugrad2021/svpa/programs/theatre-arts/>.

³⁵ "Theatre Arts Faculty," Western Connecticut State University, accessed June 19, 2021, <https://www.wcsu.edu/theatrearts/faculty/>.

³⁶ There is one national stage management accreditation process through the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST), however, many BFA and MFA programs are not accredited through this program.

deficiency when professional stage managers are on faculty, there is no regulation or guarantee that all stage management courses across the nation are being taught by stage management experts. This flexibility allows each department or professor to tailor stage management courses to fit the department goals (musical theatre, development of new works, etc.), however, the unstructured nature of stage management education makes space for practices that are unsafe, unfair, and costly. We must also acknowledge that training schools and professional associations are inherent gatekeepers and the reality of these obstacles and the question of equity must be addressed before the field can create a more inclusive professional environment.

Wilensky's third step is the creation of a professional organization, which despite several efforts, is the phase where stage management is currently stymied. Wilensky points out that "those pushing for prescribed training and the first ones to go through it combine to form a professional association."³⁷ After which, the field debates, "on whether the occupation is a profession, what the professional tasks are, how to raise the quality of recruits, and so on."³⁸ This aspect of professionalization includes separating those who have trained and are competent in the field's knowledge from those that have not. It also allows the field to define and redefine the labor with the purpose of eliminating competition with neighboring occupations. Actors' Equity Association (AEA) was founded in 1912, not as a labor union, but as a professional organization with the intention of professionalizing acting. Unfortunately, AEA was not taken seriously until its members aligned themselves with the labor movement and unionized. At the time, stage managers often held the leading roles in their shows, which means stage managers joined AEA for protection. Shockingly, many AEA actors today seem unaware that they share and have always shared their union with stage managers. This misunderstanding leads to its own set of

³⁷ Wilensky, 138.

³⁸ Ibid, 144.

mistreatments from AEA actors, as they periodically ask why their stage manager is included in the first-day of rehearsal voting or when the deputy chosen for the show refuses to support the stage manager on stage management contractual issues. Speaking out about stage management grievances in and around union platforms usually results in AEA actors telling stage managers to form their own union. In fact, stage managers attempted their own professional association in 1947, but was thwarted by AEA, which required the organization to disband.

Wilensky's step four is the creation of qualifications to narrow the field. The aim [emphasis his] is to win the "*support of law* for the protection of the job territory and its sustaining code of ethics. Where the area of competence is not clearly exclusive, legal protection of the title will be the aim (certified psychologist, registered engineer); where definition of the area of competence is clearer, than mere performance of the act by someone outside the fraternity may be declared a crime (medical practice laws)."³⁹ I posit that had stage management completed its professionalization process in the early twentieth century, a clear definition of stage management labor would have combined with legal protections to shield stage managers from retribution, generate more stage management contracts, and improve stage management working conditions.

Wilensky argues, [emphasis his] "eventually rules to eliminate the unqualified and unscrupulous, rules to reduce internal competition, and rules to protect clients and emphasize the service ideal will be embodied *in a formal code of ethics*."⁴⁰ This development of a code of ethics finishes his five-step process to professionalization. He notes that "in ten of thirteen established professions or professions in process [this step] comes at the end (civil engineering,

³⁹ Wilensky, 145.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 145.

law, medicine.)”⁴¹ This stage can also come as a beginning push for newer fields or those that need to expedite the process.⁴² Stage management has accumulated platitudes and proverbs regarding proper stage management, although many of them are in need of severe unpacking and updating to reflect a true code of ethics. This includes the adage “a good stage manager is never noticed,” which propagates the notion that stage management should be invisible. This problematic, yet common notion undermines the stage manager’s position as the person who oversees the implementation of AEA rules, their ability to promote anti-racist policies and to deescalate problematic moments in the rehearsal room. In addition, this axiom justifies disregarding stage management credits in press releases and billing, thereby erasing the field from many historical records. This erasure continues today as many trade publications leave off the stage management team when promoting up-and-coming or recently opened productions. The creation of a code of ethics that reflects and guides stage management values could aid stage managers in defining and redefining because these values will point to the field’s true purpose, motivation, and objectives during the production process.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF U.S. STAGE MANAGEMENT

Prior to the 1870s, the stage manager in the U.S. performed much of what we refer to as the director’s role today. In general, the historical stage manager chose the show, cast it, and gave major blocking, including entrances and exits, to the actors.⁴³ Most importantly, the historical stage manager also performed a leading role in the performance, which was what

⁴¹ Wilensky, 145.

⁴² Ibid, 145-146.

⁴³ F. C Burnand, *How We Manage Our Private Theatricals*, (New York: Happy Hours Co.) 1872.

paved the way for their inclusion in Actors' Equity Association in the early twentieth century.⁴⁴ The prompter performed much of what we consider the contemporary stage manager's labor. Therefore, historical scholarship on stage management has been overshadowed by the physical representation of stage management: the promptbook. Several scholars, including Charles H. Shattuck and Edward A. Langhans, devoted their careers to unlocking the mysteries of the promptbook.⁴⁵ However, their research missed a valuable opportunity to unpack the role of the prompter as a separate type of theatre worker. These scholars focused on the reconstructive nature of the promptbook as a means of recreating the performance instead of the apparent labor that went into the creation of the record. Tracy Catherine Cattell recently rectified this oversight in her dissertation, "The Living Language of Stage Management : an Interpretative Study of the History and Development of Professional Stage Management in the United Kingdom, 1567-1968," which examines the promptbook markings as a codified language for prompters and stage managers.⁴⁶ Aside from the work described above, scholarly research dedicated to historical stage management is nonexistent or subsumed within larger manuals, which provides further evidence of stage management's failed professionalization.

The above work, along with my own dissertation, is centered on Western Anglophone theatre history primarily because of its accessibility, both in language and availability. I do not have the language skills to explore sources that were not translated or originally in English. This means that the brief history described below should not be considered a comprehensive history

⁴⁴ Tracy Catherine Cattell, "The Living Language of Stage Management: an Interpretive Study of the History and Development of Professional Stage Management in the United Kingdom, 1567-1968," (PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 2015.) <http://webcat.warwick.ac.uk/record=b2770609~S1>, 150.

⁴⁵ Charles Shattuck, *The Shakespeare Promptbooks: a Descriptive Catalogue*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 1965; Edward A. Langhans, *Eighteenth Century British and Irish Promptbooks: a Descriptive Catalogue*, (New York: Greenwood Press) 1987.

⁴⁶ Cattell, "The Living Language of Stage Management."

of stage management around the world. Instead, this account concentrates on the mainstream professional theatre known as legitimate theatre in the U.S. because these White institutions were integral to creating theatrical policy in the early twentieth century. The narrative's purpose is to provide some background context to the events analyzed in this dissertation and its impact on contemporary theatre-making in the United States.

Theatre historians use European medieval paintings such as *The Martyrdom of St. Apollonia* and *A Village Fair (Village Festival in Honour of Saint Hubert and Saint Anthony)* as evidence for the prompter's role and labor in European medieval theatre.⁴⁷ In *The Martyrdom of St. Apollonia*, the prompter/monk is wearing a blue robe, with the promptbook in his hand, directing people using a baton. At the time, the actors in the painting would have been illiterate, so they needed someone who could read, to give the actors their lines and blocking. In the medieval age, monks performed the prompter's duties.⁴⁸ The prompter has gone by many names over the years, including: the bookholder, regisseur, souffler, bookkeeper, etc.⁴⁹

By the 1600s, the prompter had moved offstage and was responsible for recording the show in the promptbook and audibly prompted the actors on their lines.⁵⁰ Because theatre companies performed a different show every night, actors needed to have upwards of thirty shows memorized, making the prompter's role a vital and aural part of the production. The prompter used bells, whistles, flags, and call boys to cue a performance.⁵¹ These cueing sounds were a part of the audience's theatrical experience. Imagine sitting down to a performance and every time a scene changed, a special effect occurred, or a curtain moved, it was accompanied

⁴⁷ Lawrence, 22-41.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 23.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 22-41.

⁵⁰ Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.) 2008.

⁵¹ Aaron A. Warford, *How to Become an Actor*, (New York: F. Tousey) 1900.

with a bell or whistle sound. The role of the prompter was embedded into the performance because of its artistic contributions through prompting and cue calling and was likened to its own character in the production.⁵²

The Second Industrial Revolution transformed the theatrical production process in the United States. In the late 1800s, there was a huge influx of technology that allowed for greater theatricality and specialization within theatre. Theatrical styles transitioned from predominantly melodrama to naturalism to realism and stylized modern drama, and vestiges of each impacted the prompter's labor. Melodrama called for high theatricality and spectacle causing complex cueing sequences for the prompter. Naturalism and realism sought to recreate a natural/realistic environment. In turn, audience behavior changed from boisterous and participatory to silent and still, which required the prompter to trade their auditory cueing methods for silent ones.

By 1900, the stage director was introduced to mainstream theatre and eventually replaced the stage manager. The stage manager transitioned to oversee the technical duties that we associate with the technical director and production manager today. The prompter continued to hold and mark the promptbook during rehearsals and call the show during performances. With the assistance of speaking tubes, mainstream electricity, and the creation of the telephone, the prompter transformed from being an essential and aural part of the production, to being a silent orchestrator hidden behind the curtain. Simultaneously, the title of the cue-caller also changed. During this 50-year period, the term "prompter" became synonymous for assistant stage manager before disappearing from the lexicon. This signaled a major shift because of the enormous presence the prompter had on the theatrical sphere. In the nineteenth century, the prompter had a

⁵² James O. Spearing, "The Prompter's Art Lost to America." *New York Times*, June 19, 1927; pg. SM14. ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

weekly newspaper and numerous columns named after them including, *The Prompter*, *The Prompter's Corner*, and *The Prompter's Bell*. Actors oriented themselves off the prompter (Prompt-side vs. Opposite Prompt) and the prompter had an auditory impact on a performance, so even if the audience did not know their title, they were an important and unforgettable character in every production.

In the early twentieth century, the technical director emerged, taking over much of the technical labor previously executed by the stage manager.⁵³ The stage manager transitioned to our current conception of the production stage manager, overseeing the assistant stage manager's work but continued acting in prominent roles for the shows they stage managed. By the mid 1940s, the production stage manager had given up acting to take over calling the show from the assistant stage manager.

In sum, the prompter changed from being an active and audible character to being largely overlooked because their aural methods were gradually replaced with updated, but silent, technology. In addition, we see the stage manager shift from its directorial roots to technical direction to production manager to production stage manager. The labor moved beyond technical know-how to a position where emotional intelligence had become paramount to a job well done.

Today, stage managers use wired or wireless headsets to communicate to backstage personnel. They are portrayed as invisible magicians making magic behind the curtain. The early twentieth century represented great changes on and off the stage, and those changes had unintended long-term repercussions. As the power and authority transitioned from the stage manager to the stage director/technical director, the reputational currency and status of stage

⁵³ For the purposes of this dissertation, the title and labor of the technical director is limited to the role's references in the stage management handbooks.

managers diminished. Contemporary stage managers continue to struggle to find agency within the theatre community, their union, and their history.

BREAKDOWN OF DISSERTATION

Stage management attempted to professionalize between 1900 and 1950 and loosely achieved Wilensky's first two steps towards professionalization, but were ultimately thwarted by AEA's insistence that stage managers were actors with additional responsibilities. AEA's assertion, coupled with stage management's secondary status in the union, has led to continued unfair labor practices, the 2020/2021 "Year of the Stage Manager" grassroots campaign, and the convention resolutions raised on behalf of current stage managers.⁵⁴ Because the field has been left vulnerable without the protection of professionalization or a concrete definition, stage managers have been overlooked and undermined at the negotiation table. As the recent proposals to AEA suggest, now is the time for stage management to professionalize using anti-racist processes to combat the inequities that currently exist within the field, the union, and the workplace.

In this dissertation, I use stage management handbooks and AEA archival records to explore the ways that stage management attempted to professionalize in the early twentieth century. Between 1870 and 1974 at least thirty books were tailored towards stage management. Each author espoused their definition of stage management and the labor associated with the title. The changes in definition and labor reveal changing attitudes regarding stage management. Stage managers joined AEA because of their connections to acting, but soon that connection was not enough. By changing AEA's contractual language in 1920, AEA set the groundwork for the

⁵⁴ For more information, see <https://yearofthestagemanager.com>.

professionalization of stage management. However, AEA's renewed focus on performers stalled these efforts. While unfortunate that stage management has been stymied during its previous attempts at professionalization, the field of stage management can improve the professionalization process with this historical understanding and by reframing the professionalization around equity, diversity and inclusion, creating a new and better professionalization process.

CHAPTER 1: DEFINING STAGE MANAGEMENT: A STUDY IN CO-OCCURRENCES

Stage managers and prompters completed the first step of Wilensky's professionalization process by creating a body of knowledge through a nearly century-long publishing process. Using handbooks published between 1870 and 1980 (Appendix A), I demonstrate the ways that the defining and redefining for all three fields (prompter, stage manager, and director), played out on paper. In the research phase for this dissertation, I created an elaborate spreadsheet to document the use of all three titles, the appearance of certain key words, and the types of labor associated with these fields. With this spreadsheet (Appendix B), I have created visual representations to demonstrate the shifting titles and changing labor during this time.

This chapter also reflects on five labor categories that are particularly relevant to the rest of the dissertation. The chapter explores the stage manager as actor, as technical aficionado, as expert, and as supervisor. The final subtopic explores the increasing emphasis on stage management's emotional intelligence. Flexibility is a recurrent notion that is demonstrated throughout the chapter as the prompter and stage manager adapt and pivot during this transitional time. This demonstrates the field's durability and flexibility to overcome challenges.

This chapter portrays the ways that the field of stage management attempted to professionalize outside of and prior to the founding of the Actors' Equity Association (AEA) and establishes stage management labor trends in the early twentieth century. The purpose is to provide context for the backlash stage managers faced as they attempted to arbitrate their professionalization in the 1940s.

CHAPTER 2: STAGE MANAGER AS ACTOR: A PROBLEMATIC ORIGIN STORY

Chapter two investigates the founding of Actors' Equity Association and relates it to Wilensky's third step, creating a professional organization. AEA started as a professional organization in December 1912, but soon learned that the producers were not taking the organization seriously. As an attempt to rectify this, AEA sought the assistance of the AFL to force producers to acknowledge the bargaining rights of AEA. This chapter explores AEA's founding and reframes its history to include the role of the stage manager in its formation and early years.

After restoring the stage manager's place in early AEA history, I explore the relationship between the stage management community and AEA. In 1938 and again in 1942, the stage management community composed memos of grievances to AEA leadership. One of the requests asked AEA to recognize stage management as its own unique field, separate from acting. Instead, AEA maintained that stage managers were actors with additional responsibilities and therefore did not necessitate the demands requested. AEA's response focused on stage management's acting history and dismissed the additional duties as negligible. This reply directly contradicted the stage management handbooks from chapter one, which demonstrates that stage management had shifted towards technical oversight beginning in the 1920s. In this

chapter, I focus on the ways that AEA ignored these shifts in labor as they played out in print and in practice. This chapter portrays the beginning of a stage management movement dedicated to professionalizing the field.

CHAPTER 3: STAGE MANAGERS' ASSOCIATION: A FLAWED TURNING POINT

Chapter three builds on the last chapter by continuing to interrogate Wilensky's third step, creating a professional organization. In early 1947, 128 stage managers signed another memo of demands, which was sent to AEA's Executive Council.⁵⁵ Failing to sway AEA's opinion on the professionalization of stage management, 146 stage managers formed the Stage Managers' Association (SMA) in the fall of 1947.⁵⁶ Shortly after, AEA demanded that the SMA dissolve in exchange for an advisory stage management committee.

Building on the previous chapter's tension between AEA and the stage management field, this chapter examines the correspondence relating to the initiation of the SMA and AEA's perceived threat of the SMA's existence. The stage managers hoped that these two maneuvers (the 1947 memo and the formation of the SMA) would assist the field in finally achieving professionalization.

Ultimately, AEA recognized the stage management field as distinct and separate from acting. However, without the SMA, the field was left unable to arbitrate stage management's professionalization making this a flawed turning point for the community. AEA had granted the stage managers the recognition they were hoping for, but also limited the Stage Managers'

⁵⁵ Correspondence from Committee of Stage Managers to Mr. Paul Dullzell, 17 January 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

⁵⁶ Stage Managers' Association (SMA) Constitution and By-Laws, November 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

Committee to an advisory capacity. This meant that the committee had very little control over the actual decisions made by AEA's executive council. This chapter chronicles these events and builds on the prior two chapters as the stage management community continues its efforts towards professionalization.

CHAPTER 4: A CODA: NOW WHAT? WHERE STAGE MANAGERS NEED TO GO

This chapter makes a significant shift from the historical investigation of stage management in order to theorize directions for the future of the field. While it builds upon the historical contexts provided in the earlier chapters, the chapter reflects upon events and questions shaping the field today. This chapter allows us to see where we are in relation to where the field faced critical defining moments in the past. At the heart of this dissertation, the question remains: if the contemporary stage management community wants to complete the professionalization of the field, what steps should be taken next? In addition, how can stage managers transform a systemically racist process to achieve equity in the field? This chapter interrogates Wilensky's theory of professionalization to reflect on ways anti-racist practices and policies can be incorporated. The chapter is divided into four subsections that reflect four urgent conversations stage management needs to have: defining stage management, analyzing training programs, arbitrating a professional organization, and creating qualifications. Each of these topics intersects with the broader anti-racist conversation to inspire new pathways to professionalization.

The appendix section contains the foundational research on which much of my dissertation was based. This includes a list of stage management handbooks (Appendix A) published in the United States and Britain between 1870 and 1980, which I expanded beyond the

historical focus on 1900 and 1950 in order to map the emergence of emotional intelligence as part of stage management labor. The handbooks were analyzed manually and using digital humanities tools to create spreadsheets (Appendix B), which documented the lexical co-occurrences in key titles and labor. When I say co-occurrences, I am talking about how these phrases had multiple definitions and meanings that changed over time. The spreadsheets that appear in this dissertation have been edited and distilled down to my major findings to conserve space. The columns that contain a “yes” signify when an author used the phrase or implied meaning anywhere in the book. The “no” column should be interpreted as an item that the author chose not to discuss, rather than the author’s dismissal of the topic. This is a careful, but significant, difference, and I encourage any reader that wishes to use the “no” column information to seek the handbooks referenced directly. The columns that reference the frequency of a phrase indicate the approximate number of times that the given phrase or meaning was implied in the handbook. These approximations were either generated manually or, when available, using HathiTrust digital tools to find the key words referenced within the text to confirm the author’s intention. The spreadsheets that concern particular titles use the abbreviations “SM,” “PR,” “ASM,” and “DIR” in place of the “yes” and correlate with the title being analyzed: stage manager, prompter, assistant stage manager, and director. This cleaner method of documentation reminds the reader on the title being referenced in the spreadsheet.

There are six spreadsheets included in Appendix B which depict the qualitative analysis of the stage management handbooks. The first table characterizes the use of key titles and the frequency of each title in each of the handbooks. The second spreadsheet depicts the language used to describe the stage managers’ labor using keywords such as “communication,” “delegation,” and “gives blocking.” The final three columns on this spreadsheet are dedicated to

three key concepts: the stage manager as expert, as artist, and as a female-identifying person. The third table depicts the language associated with the prompter's labor, the fourth table shows the assistant stage managers', the fifth illustrates the director's labor. The final spreadsheet documents the changing calling technology referenced in each of the handbooks.

The AEA research was largely performed at the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archive on New York University's campus, focusing on those files that reference stage managers in the title and significant union documents including contracts, rules governing employment, and the executive council meeting minutes. As previously noted, I focused on such files associated with the founding of Actors' Equity Association and lasting until 1950. I used the union documents, *Equity*, and other trade magazines to corroborate my findings and the hypotheses generated by the stage management AEA files.

Appendix C and D comprise two of the referenced anti-racist articles that were published in 2020 on Howlround. Both pieces are instrumental in highlighting the ways in which the field of stage management currently perpetuates systemic racism and upholds values related with white supremacy. Appendix E contains a list of suggestion action items that the field of stage management must undergo to create an anti-racist professionalization process. This list was created to inspire conversation that would lead to an actionable anti-racist professionalization process.

The 2020/2021 Year of the Stage Manager grassroots campaign continues the work of our forebears, attempting to raise the reputation and status of stage managers across the nation. The campaign started as a means of educating peers about stage management, but has also served as a communication tool to highlight the challenges facing the field: lack of coverage for sick or vacation days, AEA waiving the required ASM position at the behest of the producers, repeated

conversations with producers about how overtime or support for stage management is not in the budget, actors forgetting that stage managers are also in their union, actors demanding that stage managers leave to form their own union, and remaining uncredited in press releases and other promotional material. These issues contribute to the exploitation of stage managers and erasure of stage management needs, which are then echoed in the union's treatment of stage managers.

Stage management has reached a metaphorical crossroad where decisions need to be made: should stage managers stay and fight with AEA, form their own union, or attempt to merge with another theatrical union? While each path has its benefits and drawbacks, indecision will leave the stage management community in a vulnerable place, continuing the current precedent of being exploited and overlooked. At a moment when professional theatre is considering equity in new ways and with an urgency fueled by BIPOC demands for greater inclusion and the dismantling of systemic biases, stage managers can lead these changes. As a field, stage managers must collectively join and fight for the field's vital role in U.S. theatre. This dissertation provides a foundation on which to continue the movement toward professionalization for greater respect, safety, and equity.

CHAPTER 1:

DEFINING STAGE MANAGEMENT: A STUDY IN CO-OCCURENCES

Trying to define or explain stage management to non-theatrical friends and family is endlessly frustrating. There are many aspects of the role to consider, so for brevity's sake, I liken the stage manager to the President's chief of staff. The president/director creates a vision for a policy/show and the chief of staff/stage manager serves as that vision's advocate, communicating, and organizing the West Wing/production. The director departs after opening night, leaving the future of the production in the stage manager's trustworthy hands. A plethora of stage managers would groan in the wake of such a problematic sentiment as it is extremely vague and does not address the specifics of the job. However, a sufficient and concise definition of stage management does not currently exist. Instead, the field upholds the idea that the term stage manager is so large and encompassing that you cannot truly understand the enormity of stage management without substantial personal experience. This impression contributes to the exploitation of stage managers because the field refuses to adopt a concrete definition that would create boundaries. The stage management community fears that such a definition would limit individuality and flexibility. This fear is understandable when we consider the ways that stage management is currently described. Some stage managers depict stage management through an administrative lens: facilitating and coordinating rehearsals, archiving the production in the promptbook and being extremely organized. Other definitions focus on stage management communication skills, emotional intelligence and conflict management. While more specific, both of these definitions are problematic because they only focus on certain aspects of stage management. Both definitions leave out the inherent leadership role stage managers hold in the

production process. Specific tasks may fluctuate from company to company and show to show, so the ultimate definition of stage management must connect all of the disparate explanations together but in a way that does not make stage managers vulnerable to exploitation. To achieve this, stage managers must critically consider and dissect the purpose of the stage manager in the overall production process. If the definition does not umbrella the variety of tasks associated with contemporary stage management, then the field must find a definition that will.

Furthermore, the field must consider stage management's history, which may explain current perceptions of stage management labor. Once this investigation of contemporary and historical stage management has occurred, the field will be able to articulate the undisputable function stage management currently plays and has played in the theatrical production process.

This chapter examines how stage management and theatrical handbooks published between 1870 and 1980 outline the labor and titles associated with historical stage management. In the early twentieth century, stage managers attempted to define themselves through the publication process, which allowed the field to make its initial foray into professionalization. The publication process was an individual's endeavor, however, with most of these handbooks attributed to a single author rather than representative of the field-wide conversation that Harold L. Wilensky alludes to in his theory of professionalization.¹ This field-wide conversation plays a significant role in the professionalization process as it requires a majority agreement on what is included or not included. Collectively, these handbooks depict the changing trends in theatrical management during this time, albeit from presumed White male institutions. This survey of handbooks will provide the historical context needed to explore the events of the next two chapters.

¹ Harold L. Wilensky, "The Professionalization for Everyone?" *American Journal of Sociology* 70, no. 2 (1964): 137-58. Accessed April 10, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/2775206.

Each handbook (Appendix A) was evaluated and catalogued in a spreadsheet (Appendix B) according to the books' use and definition of specific titles (stage manager, director, prompter, assistant stage manager, and call boy.) The data revealed three shifts in the definition and use of stage manager. The first shift transpired between 1870 and 1920 as the title "director" was introduced and slowly acquired the duties formerly performed by the stage manager. By 1920, the stage manager had transitioned to oversee the increasingly complicated design efforts, similar to what we now attribute to the technical director and production manager. As the term "technical director" was introduced, a second shift occurred between 1920 and 1940 when the stage manager moved to take over the prompter's labor and the title "prompter" transitioned to "assistant stage manager." The third shift took place between 1940 and 1980 when stage management handbooks began emphasizing the emotional labor performed by the stage manager. In addition to analyzing the designations, I looked at apparent and implied labor categories and behaviors to assess the type of labor expected from each position. This included specific tasks like holding the promptbook during the performance, labor skills such as technical proficiencies, and personality characteristics including tactfulness. After assessing each handbook, I created visual representations of these co-occurrences, which will be dispersed throughout the chapter to illustrate the changing titles, meaning, and labor over time.²

This chapter will be limited to the major findings from this research because a comprehensive analysis could easily be its own monograph. As such, the chapter will be organized to reflect five subtopics that are particularly relevant to later chapters. After outlining the fluctuations in titles and labor, this chapter will explore the stage manager as actor, review technical proficiencies expected, and evaluate the stage manager as an expert. Then the chapter

² How the semantic proximity of words change over time to mean different things.

will cover the stage manager as supervisor and the evolving emotional intelligence projected by the stage manager. Perhaps most important, each section will consider stage management's adaptability as the field's labor and title shifted over this hundred year period. In general, these shifts and changes demonstrate stage management's ability to adapt to the needs of the production process. Unfortunately, this malleability also made defining stage management challenging and professionalizing stage management unmanageable. Lastly, this chapter portrays the ways that the field of stage management attempted to professionalize outside of and prior to the founding of the Actors' Equity Association (AEA). This chapter establishes stage management labor trends in preparation to challenge AEA's argument in later chapters that stage managers were merely actors.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

The latter half of the nineteenth century was a transformational time, wherein U.S theatre changed drastically over a hundred-year period. Prior to the Second Industrial Revolution, U.S. theatre was composed of residential repertory theatres throughout the country, each performing a different show every night, often hiring touring stars to increase ticket sales and using stock material for sets, costumes, basic lighting and sound effects. The stage director, designers and many of the now familiar backstage production titles did not yet exist. The theatrical manager, stage manager and actor-manager were at the helm of the theatrical company. Rehearsals were varied and limited to a few hours total in the weeks and months prior to the performance.³ This is particularly stark when compared to the modern rehearsal schedule, which rehearses a single show for several weeks before opening.

³ Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.) 2008.

Over the course of a hundred years, almost everything from its rehearsal/production process, to its management and structure were fundamentally changed. The seat of theatrical power moved from regional metropolises to New York City as producers like Frohman, Shubert and the Theatrical Syndicate took over the management of many theatres. The director was introduced and was shortly followed by the technical director, designers and design teams. Rehearsals were sporadically scheduled before the director took over the staging. Shortly after, the director required regular rehearsals prior to opening. Theatre transitioned from its repertory system to long performance runs or tours. By 1950, U.S. theatre had settled into specialized acting roles, a time-consuming rehearsal process, and increasingly more elaborate design technology.

Shifts in stage management played out in the publishing process, not just in the labor and titles, but also in the book's audience. As printing became cheaper and faster, books became more readily available for those that could afford them. The first influx of stage management handbooks were geared towards affluent amateur hobbyists (see Table 2), specifically those who had the time and resources to produce a show in their parlor for friends and family. These books instructed the reader on how to evaluate and set up the parlor room to allow for backstage space or easy access for the cast, the location of the audience and included insights on the production process. In 1914, Carnegie Institute of Technology offered the first Theatre degree and by the 1930s, a new printing trend emerged when stage management handbooks were marketed as educational textbooks or as professional guidebooks.

Many of these books were written by stage managers themselves, but several were also written by directors, producers, or other theatrical practitioners. These books were presumably written by white men, but this should not imply that all stage managers were white men.

Significantly more research about historical stage management demographics is necessary before any implications should be made.⁴

Table 1: Table of Stage Management Titles and Definitions

TITLE USED IN DISSERTATION	TITLE USED IN HANDBOOKS	YEARS USED	BRIEF DEFINITION
Directing Stage Manager	Stage Manager	1870-1930	Gave blocking to actors
Prompter	Prompter	1870-1940	Recorded show in promptbook, Called the show
Call Boy	Call Boy	1870-1980	Assisted Prompter
Technical Stage Manager	Stage Manager	1900-1945	Built or helped build the scenic and other effects.
Stage Director	Director	1916-1980	Gave blocking to actors
Prompter/ ASM	Prompter or ASM	1916-1955	Recorded show in promptbook, Called the show
Technical Director	Technical Director	1916-1980	Built or helped build the scenic and other effects.
Production Stage Manager (PSM)	Stage Manager	1930-1980	Recorded show in promptbook, Called the show
Assistant Stage Manager (ASM)	Assistant or ASM	1936-1980	Assisted PSM

REVEALING TRANSITION THROUGH TITLE SHIFTS

Prior to the 1870s, stage managers performed much of what we consider the director's work today (See Table 2.) The directing stage manager often chose the play, "cast" the show,

⁴ The names of stage managers/prompters were not always included on playbills and other records. Significant more research must be conducted to find these names in order to track down birth certificates, genealogy studies and other forms of demographic data.

gave the actors their entrances and exits, and chose items from stock for scenery and props.⁵ Brander Matthews, the first full-time professor of dramatic literature, pronounced in his chapter, “The Art of the Stage-Manager,” (1907) the stage manager’s “most important function is to direct the actors themselves, to see that they read their lines intelligently, with just the emphasis requisite at that given moment in the unfolding of the story of the play, and to advise them as to the gestures and movements which should tell this story almost as plainly as the words themselves.”⁶ Interestingly, Matthews noted that the stage manager often performed multiple functions in the production process. He used David Belasco and Victorien Sardou as playwright/stage-manager examples, Augustin Daly as an actor-manager/stage manager, and E. S. Willard and E. H. Sothorn as actor/ stage-managers. Matthews noted William Gillette performed all three duties as playwright, actor-manager and stage manager.⁷ This overlap was significant because the intersection of each of these roles obscured where the directing stage manager’s duties began and where they ended. Because of this, stage managers essentially designed their own position at their individual theatres. The terms stage manager and actor-manager were often used interchangeably leading to additional confusion about how the two differed. While directing-oriented tasks, like giving blocking to the actors, were certainly part of the stage manager’s duties, the additional responsibilities fluctuated depending on the stage manager, the theatre and the other participants in the theatrical process.

⁵ In the 1870s, casting was rather structured in acting companies. Actors were typically hired to cover a particular type of role – ingénue, walking gentlemen, etc. The historical stage manager had influence over the hiring process.

⁶ Brander Matthews, “The Art of the Stage-Manager,” *Inquiries and Opinions*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons), 1907, 289.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 285.

Table 2: Handbooks that Equate Stage Managing with Directing, 1870-1920

Year Published	Book Title	Author	Publication Location	Amateur vs Educational
1870	The Guide to the Stage...	Leman Thomas Rede	London/ New York	Amateur
1872	How We Managed Our Private Theatricals	F. C. Burnand	New York	Amateur
1899	How to Become an Actor	R. C. Buchanan	London	Amateur
1900	How to Become an Actor...	Aaron A. Warford	New York	Amateur
1904	Amateur Theatricals: A Practical Guide	C. Lang Neil	London	Amateur
1907	"The Art of the Stage-Manager" in <i>Inquiries and Opinions</i>	Brander Matthews	New York	Academic
1916	Practical Stage Directing for Amateurs	Emerson Gifford Taylor	New York	Amateur
1916	Training for the Stage	Arthur Hornblow	Philadelphia	Educational

The prompter marked the promptbook, created much of the paperwork including prop and scene lists, and called the cues for the show. In *Amateur Theatricals* (1904), C. Lang Neil wrote, "Indeed the actual prompting is the smallest part of his duties. To him will be deputed the changing of scenes, the arrangement of lights, the superintendence of all properties, the writing out of stage letters, should any have to be read, the supervision of all effects on and off the stage, ringing up the curtain, and, what is more important, lowering it at the right moment, and many other duties."⁸ Although prompters were not prominent figures, each of these early books remarked on the necessity of employing an experienced prompter. Neil observed that, "none of

⁸ C. Lang Neil, *Amateur Theatricals: A Practical Guide*, (London: C.A. Pearson), 1904, 151.

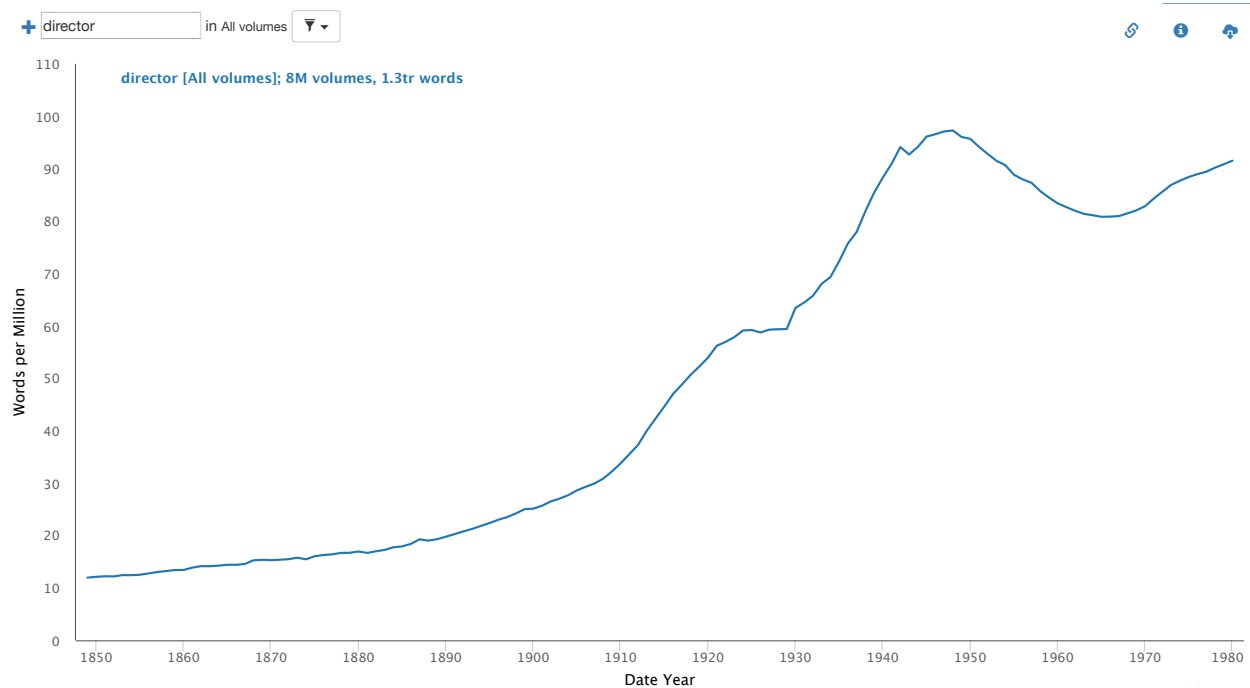
the amateurs could be entrusted with so technical, ticklish, and momentous a duty.”⁹ Since the play changed each night, the actors often relied on the prompter to get through the performance. In addition, prompters were aurally visible because they used bells and whistles to indicate curtain, music and scene shifts.

Without paging or sound systems, theatre’s relied on call boys to ensure that the actors were backstage, ready for their scenes. The prompter sent the call boy to the green room about half a page before the actor’s entrance. Call boys, also known as the prompter’s boy, acted as assistants, carrying out duties on behalf of the prompter. This included posting rehearsal calls on the call-board and/or delivering messages to the residencies of the actors.

Beginning with the 1916 handbooks, the term director started being introduced. The director was described as being hired by the stage manager, but within a decade, the books revealed producers or theatrical managers as having hired the directors. By John Dolman’s *The Art of Play Production* in 1928, the term “director” appeared over 1000 times in the 450-page manual. The commonality and the exponential increase in the use of the term is reflected in Figure 1. This line graph was produced with HathiTrust’s bookworm tool, which produces charts demonstrating the use of a given word per million words in the digital archive’s repertoire. It should be noted that this chart represents millions of volumes and is not limited to books about theatre. As you can see in Figure 1, the term was less popular until roughly 1900. The increase in its popularity cannot be solely attributed to the term’s introduction in theatre, however, the evidence demonstrates a sudden ascent across all fields, which peaked around 1945.

⁹ Neil, 34.

FIGURE 1: Use of "Director" words per million from 1870-1980



The director was hired to stage the play. Dolman observed, “[The director] seldom chooses the cast or designs the settings, though he may be called into consultation on both points. Sometimes he is not even hired until after the cast is chosen. He is given the script with certain stipulations as to the manner of the production; he lays out the stage movements and proceeds to conduct the actual rehearsals and his work ends with the final rehearsal or with the first performance.”¹⁰ In this citation we see that the director assumed some of the tasks previously performed by the directing stage manager. Dolman noted that in many cases the technical stage manager had become subordinate to the director, performing technical tasks like building the

¹⁰ John Dolman, Jr. *The Art of Play Production*, (New York: Harper & Brothers), 1928, 331.

set.¹¹ This implied the first shift of authority between the technical stage manager and director, essentially flipping the former power structure between them.

Table 3: Handbooks that Equate Stage Managing with Technical Knowledge and Shaded Handbooks Equate Stage Managing with Technical Direction, 1900-1940

Year Published	Book Title	Author	Publication Location	Amateur vs Educational
1900	How to Become an Actor...	Aaron A. Warford	New York	Amateur
1904	Amateur Theatricals: A Practical Guide	C. Lang Neil	London	Amateur
1907	"The Art of the Stage-Manager" in <i>Inquiries and Opinions</i>	Brander Matthews	New York	Educational/ Professional
1916	Practical Stage Directing for Amateurs	Emerson Gifford Taylor	New York	Amateur
1916	Play Productions in America	Arthur Edwin Krows	New York	Amateur and Educational
1928	The Art of Play Production	John Dolman, Jr.	New York	Amateur/ Educational
1930	Runnin' The Show: A Practical Handbook	Richard Whorf, Roger Wheeler	Boston	Amateur
1934	Scenery Simplified: A Director's Digest of Scenery and Stage Management	Glenn R Webster William Wetzel	Denver	Amateur
1936	Stage Management	Peter Bax	London	Educational/ Professional
1937	Stage Management for Amateur Theatre	William Perdue Halstead	New York	Amateur
1939	Proscenium and Sight-lines	Southern, Richard.	New York	Professionals

¹¹ Dolman, 331.

In the 1920s, the handbooks listed in Table 3 describe the stage manager's labor in technical terms. Dolman wrote, "The stage manager takes entire charge of the production subject to the director's orders. He organizes the stage crew, arranges for the making or hiring of scenery, properties and costumes, summons the actors to rehearsal, sees that they are called for their cues, holds and marks the prompt-book, and in every way relieves the director of executive detail."¹² This sentiment was reinforced throughout Peter Bax's 1936 handbook, which was mostly centered around technical subjects like how to build scenery and props, create lighting and sound effects, and things to consider for costumes and make-up. Bax maintained, "[The technical stage manager] must be a veritable Jack-of-all-trades and master of them all, willing and able to show a stage crew 'how it is done' as well as able to do it himself. ¹³... [The technical stage manager] knows how the set goes together. He has worked on its design, or at least knows what effects are desired. He works out a building plot from the scene plot, decides what each member of the crew is to do, rehearses them in doing it, and works the show."¹⁴ The stage manager described in the handbooks published roughly between 1920 and 1940 (see shaded area of Table 3) was one who was transitioning away from a directorial past to one who was overseeing the technical details as part-technical director, part-production manager and intimating the field's future shift to contemporary stage management.

In the 1930s, handbooks introduced the term "technical director" as a position under the stage manager; however, the technical director quickly became the head of their department. William Perdue Halstead's *Stage Management for the Amateur Theatre* (1937), used the term "technical director" as a position parallel to the director. In Halstead's book, the stage manager

¹² Dolman, 338.

¹³ Peter Bax, *Stage Management*, (London: L. Dickson), 1936.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 121.

appears under the technical director's oversight, undercutting the stage manager's former authority again. Although the stage manager was moved another step away from its former influence, Halstead attributed roughly twenty positions and their staff to the stage manager's supervision. This included the assistants for scene shifting and marking, stage carpenters, the effect master, head call boy, assistant call boys, signal board operator, assistant in charge of checking, reader for scene shifting rehearsal, and timer. Halstead noted that the stage manager also supervised the curtain man, superintendent of flying and staff, property master and clearers, electrician and operators, costume master and staff, make-up master and staff, musical director and staff, actors and the prompter during the performance. Halstead's stage manager, though different from the technical director, still required technical competence to complete stage management labor. Over half his book, marketed for stage managers, contained detailed technical information about building sets, props, costumes and other production departments.

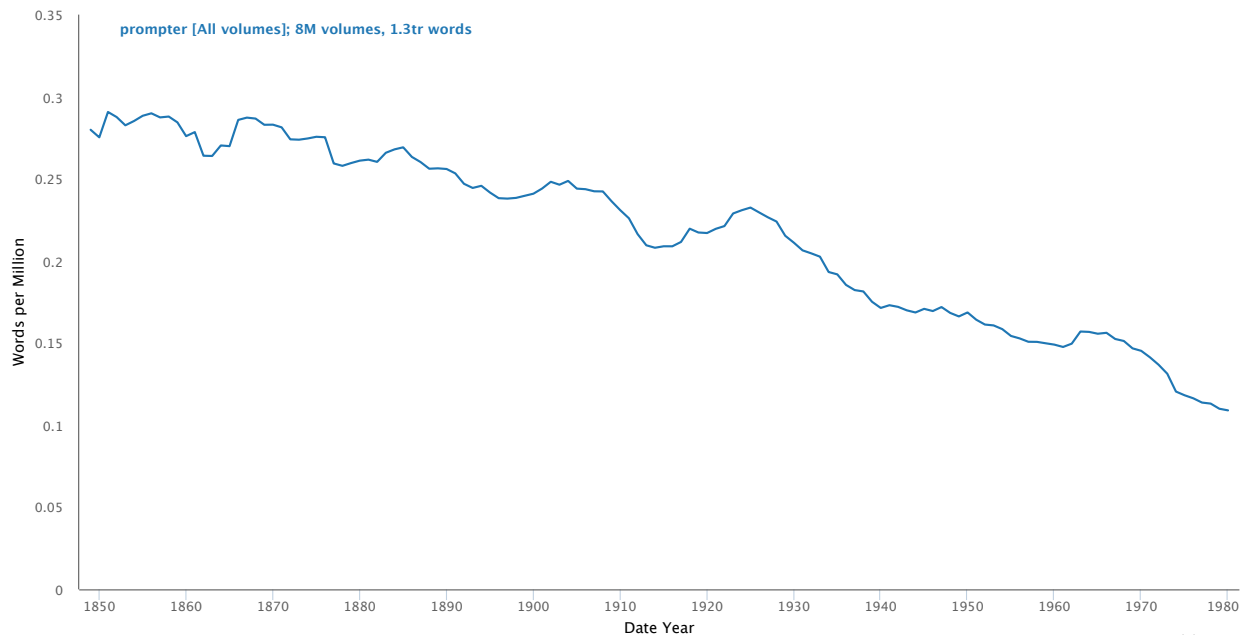
By the 1940s, the technical director was regularly referenced as its own position in stage management handbooks. In turn, the production stage manager began taking over some of the prompter's labor, (see Table 4.) Earlier handbooks had attributed holding and marking the promptbook and calling the show to the prompter. These manuals in the 1940s began inferring that any stage management team member: stage manager, prompter, assistant stage manager, call boy may complete those tasks as needed. As the production stage manager slowly began taking over the prompter's labor, the title "prompter" became synonymous for assistant stage manager. In the span of a decade, the handbooks switched to reference the assistant stage manager first and indicated that one of the assistant stage managers would perform the duties formerly attributed to the prompter. References to the prompter steadily decreased after the 1940s.

Table 4: Handbooks that Equate Stage Managing with Production Stage Management, 1940-1980

Year Published	Book Title	Author	Publication Location	Amateur vs Educational
1937	Stage Management for Amateur Theatre	William Perdue Halstead	New York	Amateur
1937	A Stage Manager's Manual	Edward Cyrus Cole, Yale University	Yale University	Educational
1937	A Manual of Play Production	Drummond, A. M.	Cornell Co-operative Society	Educational
1939	Proscenium and Sight-lines	Southern, Richard.	New York	Professional
1952	The Stage Manager's Handbook	Bert Gruver	New York	Educational
1959	Modern Theatre Practice: A Handbook of Play Production	Hubert C. Heffner	New York	Educational
1968	Stage Management and Theatre craft: A Stage Manager's Handbook	Hendrik Baker	New York	Educational
1974	Stage Management: A Guidebook of Practical Techniques	Lawrence Stern	Boston	Educational/Professional

Interestingly, this decline is also characterized in HathiTrust's collection as seen in Figure 2, which is a snapshot of the use of the term prompter per million words. As a reminder, HathiTrust's Bookworm tool reflects the use of a given word across its entire collection and is not limited to stage management or even theatrical collections. Even so, this diagram supports the declining use of the term prompter.

FIGURE 2: The use of "Prompter" words per million, 1870-1980

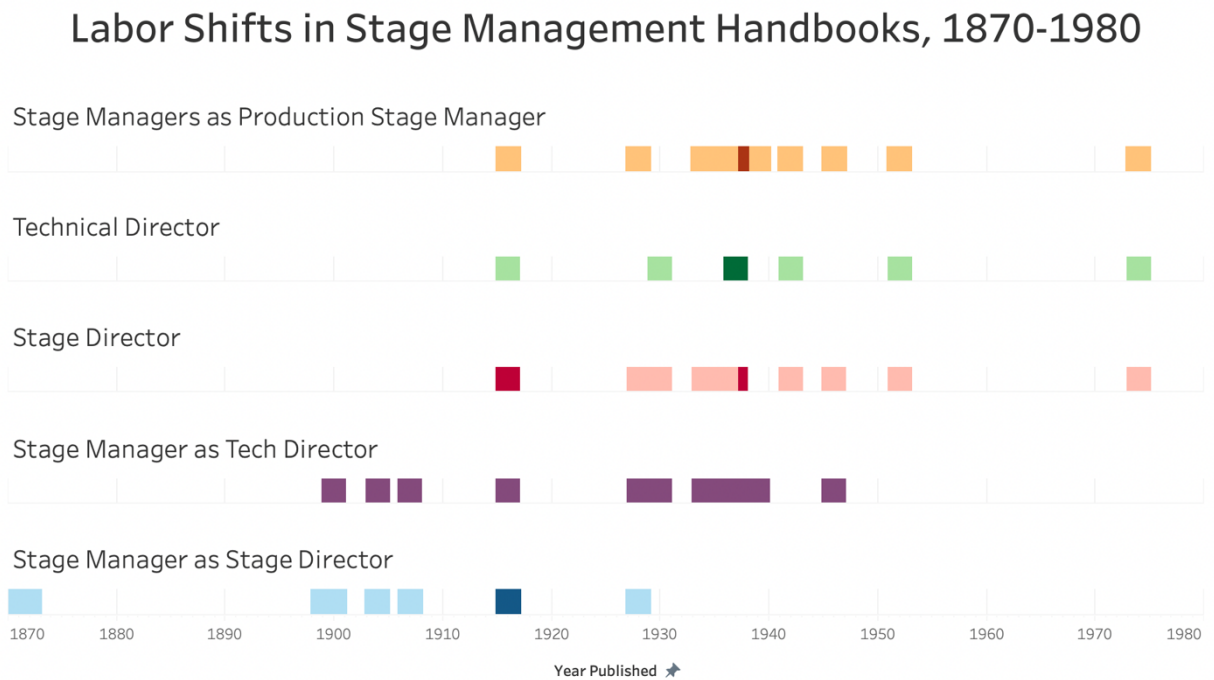


In 1952, handbooks specifically dedicated to stage managers/stage management, not including those handbooks marketed for a general/all-inclusive production audience, experienced an organizational shift. Bert Gruver's *The Stage Manager's Handbook* was the first to move away from a technical organization based on production departments (scenery, costumes, etc.) towards one reflective of the production process (pre-rehearsal period, rehearsals, performances). This organizational change represented the completion of historical stage management's shift from its directorial roots to contemporary stage management.

While my description of these transitions make them seem fairly linear and uncomplicated, the reality was much less definitive. As demonstrated in Figures 7 and 8, these shifts overlapped one another and many of these textbooks contradicted each other as the field slowly progressed away from directing tasks towards what we would consider contemporary stage management labor. As you can see in Figure 3, there is a definitive overlap between stage manager as director, stage manager as technical director, and the introduction of the term stage

director. There are also contradictions evident when stage manager as technical director transitioned to mean contemporary production stage manager. These shifts depict stage management’s ability to pivot and adapt in moments of change. However, this graph indicates that getting these historical stage managers to agree on a single definition would have been difficult as the field mediated the changing complexities of modern theatre.

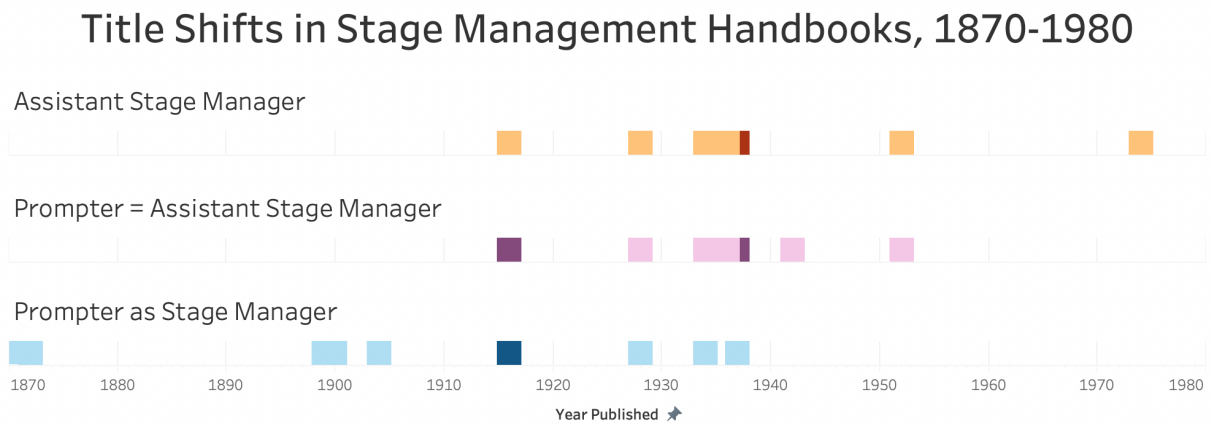
FIGURE 3: Use and Frequency of Stage Management Titles



In Figure 4, the crossover between prompter as stage manager and prompter as assistant stage manager occurred between 1910 and 1920. Like the stage manager, the prompter also shifted, but in different ways. Instead, the prompter’s title did the shifting during this period, rather than the labor associated with it. This offered its own challenges to defining and professionalizing the field as this transition moved the prompter from its long-respected separate

place in the production process to being engrossed into the recently reconstructed stage management field.

FIGURE 4: Use and Frequency of Titles for Prompter



In addition to shifting titles, the prompter also changed in other ways. In the early twentieth century, prompters implemented printed templates for paperwork to make the creation and tracking of production information easier. Prompters started using typewriters to create scripts, document notes and other paperwork lists. As technology became available, the prompter changed the methodologies used to perform the job, hanging up their bells and whistles to take on speaking tubes, cue lights and telephones. In doing so, the prompter swiftly transitioned from one of visible and aural presence in the performance to one of silence and invisibility. It is interesting to note that as the prompter/ASM transitioned from its visible station, the handbooks reflect the diminishing expectation that prompters/ASMs were experts and artists in the theatrical production process. While the labor of the prompter remained mostly the same, the methodologies to complete these specific tasks transitioned to reflect the theatrical needs and technology of the time.

TRANSITIONS OF AUTHORITY

As previously hinted, with the changes of title also came transitions of power. In the late nineteenth century, the directing stage manager was considered the leader of the theatrical process. One common association in early stage management manuals compared the directing stage manager to other notable positions. In *Amateur Theatricals* (1904), C. Lang Neil compared the stage manager and prompter to those of captain and sergeant, “The stage manager organizes and drills his company, makes an accurate list of all that is wanted in the way of scenery, properties, and stage effects, and having clearly explained to the different characters all they will require for use at night, he leaves it to the prompter to see his directions carried out.”¹⁵ In 1907 Matthews wrote, “In the nineteenth century, the conductor had won full recognition as an instrumentalist of a new type, who, without any instrument of his own, played on the whole body of musicians under his command....What the conductor is to a performance of orchestral music, the stage-manager is to the performance of a play in the theater.”¹⁶ In *Practical Stage Directing for Amateurs* (1916) Emerson Gifford Taylor wrote, “we should think of the stage manager just as we think of the conductor of an orchestra. As the latter “reads” a symphony, so the former “reads” a play. Both are interpreters.”¹⁷ These associations demonstrate the ways that authors used metaphors to illustrate the respective position, function and authority of the historical stage manager to the theatrical process. The power and authority implied in these allegories insinuate that the nineteenth century directing stage manager was an indisputable leader.

Once the director made an appearance, the technical stage manager eventually moved adjacent to the director’s authority. As the technical aspects of the performance grew

¹⁵ Neil, 154.

¹⁶ Matthews, 284.

¹⁷ Emerson Gifford Taylor, *Practical Stage Directing for Amateurs; a Handbook for Amateur Managers and Actors*, (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co.) 1916, 28.

complicated, the technical director appeared in order to manage the technical parts of the production. After which, the stage manager moved from adjacent to the director to being supervised by the technical director. Eventually the formation of the production director/production manager would slowly move the stage manager from under the technical director's supervision to the production manager, where the stage manager is most often positioned today. With each of these moves, the authority and power previously associated with the stage manager diminished. In addition, the stage manager transitioned from being the face of the production, unless a star was employed, to being invisible and silent behind the curtain. By 1974, Lawrence Stern's handbook *Stage Management* recommended stage managers to "keep [their] mouth[s] shut and [their] eyes and ears open."¹⁸ Although Stern's intention was to warn against gossiping and interrupting the rehearsal process, this virtue was twisted, perpetuated, and internalized that stage managers should not challenge the status quo. Because of this, stage managers today can lack institutional power, which further hinders the professionalization process. Stage managers hold informational and perhaps referential power, but often lack the legitimate power to make change. For this reason, the stage management field must consider the ways that stage managers operate within the system at large.

Directing stage managers and prompters shared an employer/employee dynamic, but as theatrical hierarchy transitioned to include producers, directors, and all of the other departments, the relationship between the stage manager and prompter shifted to supervisor/assistant. By the mid-1930s, production stage managers began taking over some of the prompters' duties, eventually becoming the team leader assigning their assistants, including the former prompter, with specific duties. In later handbooks, once the stage manager had begun calling the show, one

¹⁸ Lawrence Stern, *Stage Management: A Guidebook of Practical Techniques*, (Boston, Allyn and Bacon), 1974, 265.

assistant was responsible for the scenic and props, and another for the costumes and actors, including the tasks of the former prompter. This transition also shifted the authority and control over the prompter's labor from the prompter to the production stage manager.

According to several of the books written between 1870 and 1916 (see Appendix A), many of theatre's greatest stage managers progressed from call boy to prompter to actor to stage manager. This is an interesting dynamic as stage managers were at the top of this paradigm in terms of reputation and status. Many actors sought the stage manager's position of their company. By 1950, the stage manager was no longer at the top of the employment ladder. Instead, the advertised progression of a theatrical practitioner was call boy to prompter/ASM to stage manager to actor to director to producer. This fundamentally changed the organizational structure and the reputational currency of stage managers, making their ambition to professionalize all the more desperate.

Stage managers wrestled with defining themselves and their profession in an attempt to retain their previous status. These handbooks have preserved the defining and redefining, the contradictions, and the tensions between these fields through the publishing process. This represented stage management's first attempt at professionalization as the authors hashed out the titles/duties/definitions of stage management in their respective publications. These attempts ultimately failed to unify the profession because of the field's adaptability and the absence of field-wide agreements. This flexibility allowed the field to meet the needs of the changing theatrical landscape, but it also prevented the field from establishing a single agreed-upon characterization of the stage manager, leading to the myriad of definitions we currently have today. From these disappointing efforts, the burden of professionalization transitioned to the

professional organization called Actors' Equity Association (AEA), which will be explored in chapters two and three.

TASKS AS DEMONSTRATIVE OF CHANGE

The analysis of labor associated with these changing titles revealed additional layers of tensions and contradictions as the authors of these handbooks attempted to rebrand stage management to be closer to their individual liking. Not all of these handbooks were written by stage managers, and as such, adds another level of pretext when considering how these stage managers were referenced within the work. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will be focusing on five types of labor associated with the stage management/prompter titles.

As Actors

Since the prompter performed the duties we associate with contemporary stage management, we must acknowledge the prompter's role as an actor when we consider stage management's acting roots. Western theatrical prompters and actors have been intricately linked for over 700 years. In fifteenth century Europe, the prompter held the promptbook and stood behind the actors to whisper lines and blocking during the performance.¹⁹ By the sixteenth century the prompter had moved offstage, and eventually was expected to perform small parts as necessary.²⁰

There was a long-held belief that prompting and stage managing taught an actor how to act far better than hiring a tutor because it allowed the actor to be in the room to witness and

¹⁹ W. J. Lawrence, *Old Theatre Days and Ways*, (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd. , 1935), 22-41.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 22-41; Tiffany Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 275; William Warland Clapp, *A Record of the Boston Stage*. (Boston: J. Munroe and Company,) 1853, 32.

experience the successes and failures of the cast. As Hodgkinson, a stage manager in Boston in 1798, once said, “[Mr. Dickson] could learn more in one year by holding the promptbook, than he could by acting seven, - a remark which was fully realized by the recipient of this valuable hint.”²¹ In addition, prompting would have allowed the individual to step into roles, almost as an emergency understudy, should a replacement not be found in time. In which case, the prompter, whenever onstage, would hand off their responsibilities to the call boy or stage manager, provided that neither were onstage at the same time. I imagine this made backstage just as chaotic as it sounds, though perhaps less significantly, since the lighting, sound, and other effects were less numerous as they are today. As previously noted, the perceived progression was call boy – prompter – actor – stage manager. Keep in mind that the stage manager was an experienced actor and continued acting in the choicest of roles. The prompter, having demonstrated their acting chops, may seek to move into the acting company. This is not to say that there were not prompters who dedicated years to their craft, only that some prompters sought the position of prompter to establish their acting skills with the aim of moving into an acting position.

Directing stage managers acted in the leading roles of their companies, and many well-known actors stage managed at one time or another in their career. As such, it should be no surprise that many of these early handbooks leaned into the sentiment. In the mid-nineteenth century, many leading actors such as Laura Keene and Charlotte Cushman served as stage manager. In 1842, Cushman took over as the stage manager at the Walnut Street theatre.²² Keene was the stage manager for the now infamous production of *Our American Cousin*, which

²¹ William Warland Clapp, *A Record of the Boston Stage*. (Boston: J. Munroe and Company, 1853), 46.

²² “Charlotte Saunders Cushman ‘of the Walnut Street Theatre.’” The Library Company of Philadelphia, accessed January 21, 2021, <https://digital.librarycompany.org/islandora/object/digitool%3A59342>.

promptly ended when John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Abraham Lincoln. She also starred in that performance as Florence Trenchard.²³ In fact, many of these handbooks reiterated multiple times that just about every famous actor at the end of the nineteenth century had also stage managed and/or began their career either as call boy or prompter.

By the early twentieth century, stage managing and acting were intricately linked in U.S. theatre. Given this history and this connection, it is unsurprising to find that upon the founding of Actors' Equity Association (AEA) in 1912, many stage managers joined and enjoyed the benefits provided. On the other hand, there were other stage managers who were not as keen about joining the actors, instead choosing to side with the producers. In fact, in the *Revolt of the Actors* (1929), a book on AEA's founding, there were several examples about stage managers who manipulated or obfuscated to prevent a strike in 1919 on behalf of the producers. In one such story, a Boston chorister named Kathleen Carroll had announced that she was planning on striking. The cast, crew and musicians were eager to hear if she had changed her mind and arrived at the theatre after all. Several cast members turned to Gardner, the stage manager and AEA deputy for the production, for an update. Gardner blatantly lied, announcing that the actress was already in her dressing room. Moments later, Carroll popped her head in at the stage door, announced her participation in the strike, and thereby, revealed the stage manager's duplicity, and left.²⁴ Carroll's move to strike forced her theatre to shut down and led the Boston faction of the 1919 AEA strike to victory. Anti-union stage managers, like Gardner, were perhaps motivated by additional pay or other benefits. Either way, in September 1919 AEA was formally

²³ Erin Blakemore, "What Role Did Laura Keene Play in Lincoln's Last Night?" JSTOR Daily, updated April 14, 2015, <https://daily.jstor.org/what-role-did-laura-keene-play-in-lincolns-last-night/>; Harbin, Billy J. "Laura Keene at the Lincoln Assassination." *Educational Theatre Journal* 18, no. 1 (1966): 47-54. Accessed March 14, 2021. doi:10.2307/3205119.

²⁴ Alfred Harding, *The Revolt Of The Actors*, (New York: William Morrow & Co.) 1929, 268-272.

recognized as a bargaining partner. By February 1920, Actors' Equity Association explicitly embraced stage managers as members and stipulated that every AEA production have an AEA stage manager attached.

It is important to note that throughout this chapter, multiple significant and sometimes contradictory events were happening at the exact same time. This made things seem chaotic and isolated. As the director took over directing, and the stage manager transitioned to overseeing the technical aspects of the production, the technical stage manager had less and less time to dedicate to acting in the shows they stage managed. This shift coincided with the founding of Actors' Equity Association. Over the next two decades, stage management and acting gradually separated to embody two distinct theatrical fields. Stage managers began taking on smaller and smaller roles in an effort to focus on the backstage needs of the production as those requirements expanded. This re-focusing away from acting is documented in historical guidebooks as the authors recommended cutting back or abstaining from acting while stage managing.

Technical Proficiencies

In Wilensky's theory of professionalization, he references "technical knowledge" as a crucial aspect of the definition. He argues that the more specific and detailed and unquestionable the technical knowledge for the field, the easier it will be to achieve professionalization. He clarifies that "technical knowledge" does not mean scientific or mechanical knowledge, but instead a reference to the field's rigorous standards and codified doctrines that guide the field.²⁵ Interestingly, the technical proficiencies of stage management swiftly changed multiple times as the labor expectations transitioned from directorial to technical direction to contemporary stage

²⁵ Wilensky, 138.

management. However, for the purposes of this subsection, the term “technical knowledge” will refer to the art and science behind scenery, lighting, sound, props, costumes, etc.

Some of the handbooks praised the technical knowledge displayed by competent stage managers of their time; whereas, others undercut those abilities by holding the previous stage management definition on a pedestal. For example, R. C. Buchanan referenced the technically-inclined stage manager as a “nonentity in such companies – a kind of over grown up to date call boy” in his 1899 handbook, *How to Become an Actor*.²⁶ In the passage, Buchanan was alluding to how prodigious the former directing stage manager was and contended that the reincarnated technically-focused stage manager was merely a “Mr. Somebody or other who looks at the scenery and properties on Monday morning in each new town visited, rings the curtain up and down at night, and now and then varies a somewhat tiresome and thankless occupation by making a fearful noise in keeping others quiet during the action of the play.”²⁷ His condescending remarks minimize the role of the stage manager to a few mere tasks. In writing these statements, Buchanan underscores the correlation between a field’s reputation and the labor associated. Many of the other authors valued these technical proficiencies, but as an outlier, Buchanan forecasts the stage manager’s diminishing prestige.

Many of the handbooks, especially those written between 1900 and 1940, reflected on the stage manager’s technical skills. In almost every handbook published during this time, the author expected the stage manager to know about the scenic, lighting, and costumes. As a result, these books dedicated most of their pages to in-depth instructions on how to achieve particular effects. These books include: Richard Whorf and Roger Wheelers’s *Runnin’ The Show: A Practical Handbook* (1930), Glenn R Webster and William Wetzel’s *Scenery Simplified: A Director’s*

²⁶ R. C. Buchanan, *How to Become an Actor*, (London: Samuel French), 1899, 41.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 41.

Digest of Scenery and Stage Management (1934), Peter Bax's *Stage Management* (1936), and Halstead's *Stage Management for the Amateur Theatre* (1937). In all of these texts, the book was organized by department and attempted to convey all of the technical know-how needed to execute the stage manager's duties.

A few of these texts proclaimed that the stage manager must be intimately aware of the proper way to build and create effects. Webster and Wetzel (1934) wrote, "By a glance he will know whether he must change hinges on existing doors or provide for hinges in the proper places in the doors he must build."²⁸ In several of the books, the authors claimed that a stage manager should be able to tell from across the stage that a flat was built properly. Other technical skills included the ability "to determine what material for the setting is in stock and what must be build new" and required the stage manager to translate the artistic drawings into terms of wood and canvass.²⁹ In addition, the stage manager also handled the account sheets.³⁰ As the technical aspects became more complicated, the stage manager began outsourcing the build to contractors, thus paving the way for the future technical director and production manager.³¹

As the technical stage managers took on more technical responsibilities, their acting opportunities lessened. Most of the handbooks after 1920 do not acknowledge the stage manager's onstage acting obligations. If mentioned at all, the authors recommended that the stage manager choose a small role in order to dedicate themselves to the technical work. Great acting may have been the foundation of the former stage managers' success before the 1920s, but as they transitioned away from directing towards the technical and eventual prompter's duties,

²⁸ Glenn R. Webster and William Wetzel, *Scenery Simplified: A Director's Digest of Scenery and Stage Management*, (Denver, Eldridge Entertainment House, Inc.) 1934, 30.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 40 and 33.

³⁰ Bax, 65.

³¹ *Ibid*, 103-104.

acting was pushed to the back burner. The absence and/or brief mentioning of acting responsibilities further substantiates stage management's shift away from acting. This is quite a discrepancy when compared to AEA's rulings in the 1940s that stage managers were actors with additional responsibilities, as not a single one of these handbooks validates AEA's view.

Stage managements' adaptability is demonstrated as the field shifted away from directing towards what may seem like a completely different skillset. As the former directing stage manager, these individuals would have had basic technical proficiencies, but many relied on their prompter and crew to do some of the work. Instead of blending into the cast and retaining their leading roles, the field welcomed the directors and shifted to fill in the technical gaps.

As Artists and as Experts

Many handbooks treated the stage manager, and even prompter, as experts because of their expansive skillset. Each text reflects different expert skills based on what the author thought was most important to the job. The earlier books, which focused on amateur or parlor theatrical presentations, contended that the "duties of a stage manager are so many and so varied, that in the majority of cases an expert is absolutely indispensable to a complete and artist success."³² C. Lang Neil (1904) wrote, "The very first thing to attend to, in preparing for an amateur play, is to select the very best stage manager available. On this point there can be absolutely no discussion. Without a stage manager, you can get no good results."³³ Less than a page later, the author argued, "The stage manager is of far more importance than the most talented actor."³⁴ Part of this emphasis is because of the authors' assumption that the others working on the show were

³² Neil, 74.

³³ Ibid, 25.

³⁴ Ibid, 26.

amateurs and therefore the stage manager could guide the group from conception to the performance. Matthews (1907) argued that, “a wise dramatist, if he were put to the choice, would prefer to have his piece performed by a company of average merit directed by a stage-manager of skill and authority, than by far better actors under lax and inefficient stage-management.”³⁵ In this situation, the stage manager’s expertise is in leadership and focusing the group during the production process. In contrast, having numerous talented actors without a leader may result in incongruencies within the performance as each actor makes their own decisions, not for the benefit of the play, but for the benefit of themselves. Therefore, Matthews infers that a reputable stage manager outweighs talented actors because the directing stage manager will create a more cohesive product for the dramatist.

Interestingly, many of these books referenced the early prompter with a great deal of respect maintaining an idea that, “The work of the prompter is in itself an art.”³⁶ Many newspaper articles from this time period also reflect the art of prompting as knowing precisely when to lend a hand. Some of the articles insinuate that the act of calling the show was both an artform and an area of expertise. The prompter needed to know the show inside and out in order to adequately do their job, either in prompting a lost actor or in signaling the cues. In 1879, Walter Herries Pollock and Lady Pollock wrote in their monograph, *Amateur Theatricals*, “If anyone thinks I am wrong in classing [prompting] under the head of ‘Art,’ let him try it himself.”³⁷ In a rare occurrence, the assistant stage manager was referenced as an expert in *Stage Management* (1936). Peter Bax wrote, “Probably the most important asset of the A.S.M. is a prodigious memory for details. He must be a regular encyclopaedia of information for

³⁵ Matthews, 289.

³⁶ Dolman, 348.

³⁷ Pollock, Walter Herries and Lady Pollock. *Amateur Theatricals*. London: Macmillan and Co. 1879, 47.

everyone.”³⁸ As prompting merged into stage managing, the degree to which the prompter/ASM was associated with artistic relevance or expertise dipped. Most likely, this is because the prompter shifted from being its own recognizable position to being one of a team of stage managers for a production. As a result, these later books lumped the prompter, ASM and stage manager into a single group, rather than address the proficiencies associated with each.

The artistic value of the stage manager today seems fairly arbitrary depending on what the author or individual considers art. Some contemporary stage managers argue that calling the show or creating concise-easy-to-read paperwork are extremely artistic endeavors, while other stage managers maintain that stage managers are not artistic. Stage managers will need to discuss the current and historical artistic value in their work and decide on its importance for the field-wide definition of stage management.

In contemporary stage management books, expectations of perfection and expertise are articulated in various ways throughout the pages.³⁹ Matthews (1907) notes, “it is the duty of the stage manager to handle all the elements in his control so as to make the performance as perfect as possible...”⁴⁰ Dolman (1916) wrote, [the stage manager should] be omniscient and omnipotent; let nothing escape you, and perfect every detail.”⁴¹ And striving for perfectionism is contextually alluded throughout Lawrence Stern’s 1974 handbook, defining stage management as “the individual who accepts responsibility that the rehearsals and performances will run smoothly on stage and backstage.”⁴² Stern’s definition insinuates that if a perfect performance is unrealized, the stage manager is the person who will answer for such human failures. Building

³⁸ Bax, 21.

³⁹ In chapter 4, I consider the disadvantages of perfectionist values while reinforcing ways that stage management can establish competence.

⁴⁰ Matthews, 289

⁴¹ Dolman, 278.

⁴² Lawrence Stern, 5.

on this perfectionism, the expert opinion of the stage manager is often undermined or overlooked in the workplace and discussions of stage management barely reach outside of the specialists themselves. One of the objectives in professionalization is to raise the level and breadth of recruitment to the field. This implies clarifying the expertise in stage management, but in a way that makes stage management's expertise recognizable to the general public as well as to the producers and producing companies. It is not enough that the stage management field considers itself a group of experts. Consensus from a handful of colleagues and producers is also not enough. A key aspect of professionalization is the public's recognition of the stage manager's expertise.

As Supervisor

Every single one of the handbooks used key words like "discipline" and "delegation" to demonstrate the stage manager's supervisory role in theatre. In the earliest texts, the authors designated the stage manager as the primary leader. But as the stage manager transitioned out of directing towards production stage management, the position changed to middle-management. The early prompter was also considered a leader, or at least delegated and disciplined other theatrical workers to get the job done. As the prompter transitioned to the stage manager's assistant, the books focused less on the prompter's leadership role in theatre.

Delegation and discipline were most often used to describe the stage manager and/or prompter's leadership role. Interestingly, many of these handbooks attributed these leadership skills to an innate knowledge. Taylor (1916) wrote, "Most of all, the stage manager must have that curious gift or trait called personality which makes it easy for other persons to obey him, and

that fellow-gift which enables a man to see his own ideas clearly and transmit them to others.”⁴³

These authors are ultimately tying stage management leadership skills to an individual’s emotional intelligence, which will be explored in the next section. It is important to note the strong connection between these two subsections of labor because the leadership displayed by stage managers today heavily relies on strong emotional intelligence.

In the 1870 handbook titled *The Guide to the Stage*, Leman Thomas Rede noted that the prompter delegated tasks to the callboys.⁴⁴ This connection between the prompter and callboys continued throughout the books until just before the stage manager took over the prompter’s labor. At this point, the stage manager became the leader and delegated to both the prompter and call boy. Later, after the assistant stage manager became synonymous for prompter, a few of the handbooks tied leadership and delegation to the assistant stage manager. However, this authority was being bestowed on the ASM from the stage manager, instead of being inherently assumed through the title.

In *Practical Stage Directing for Amateurs* (1916) Taylor wrote, the “Stage manager has supreme authority,” but uses business manager, stage carpenter, property master, electrician, prompter to get the work done.⁴⁵ This implied that the stage manager heavily relied on delegation as a means to get work done. This was reinforced in 1928, when Dolman remarked that, “The entire stage crew, under the direction of its department heads, takes orders from the stage manager, or from the assistant stage manager if there is one.”⁴⁶ Webster and Wetzel (1934) went one step further to remark that during load-in, the stage manager should be free of specific

⁴³ Taylor, 80.

⁴⁴ Leman Thomas Rede, *The Guide to the Stage, or, How to Enter the Theatrical Profession, Obtain an Engagement, and Become an Actor Founded on and Partly Taken from Leman Rede's Book*, (New York: Samuel French), 1870.

⁴⁵ Taylor, 81.

⁴⁶ Dolman, 341.

responsibilities in order to fill in for emergencies. The authors wrote, “The stage manager makes no provision for himself in the various moves in the set-up [of the set]. His position is at stage center, ready for any emergency - to give aid if a flat starts to get away from one of the crew, which may happen on even the best-run stages, to assist where he sees the plan is slowing down, to direct where the crew might collide in their work and cause disaster, to check the entire proceeding.”⁴⁷ Interestingly, many contemporary producers feel that assistant stage managers should shoulder the bulk of the show’s backstage moves in order to save money on backstage crew. The belief that stage managers should delegate to prepare for emergency situations is quite contrary to the current belief that inactive stage managers and ASMs are a waste. On many of the productions I have worked, the ASM has been required to participate in much of the backstage choreography due to a shortage of helping hands. In a few of those productions, that meant the ASM was unable to assist with minor emergencies offstage, requiring off-stage actors to provide aid instead. In one such case, that meant a missed entrance and a delay in the scene, interrupting the flow of the performance. Edward Cyrus Cole, author of “A Stage Manager’s Manual” created by and for Yale School of Drama in 1937, asserts that the stage manager should, “Delegate as many duties as possible to subordinates.”⁴⁸ While arbitrating professionalization, the stage management community needs to also consider the role of the assistant stage manager and the role of leadership and delegation required by the various related positions.

The word “discipline” appeared quite frequently throughout these books. In 1870, Rede remarked that the prompter fined the actors for being late, or not attending rehearsals, or other inappropriate behavior.⁴⁹ Many of the books referenced the stage manager’s responsibility to

⁴⁷ Webster, 126.

⁴⁸ Edward Cyrus Cole, *A Stage Manager’s Manual*, (New Haven: Yale University,) 1937, 24.

⁴⁹ Rede, 23.

maintain discipline backstage. This included mediating disputes between the cast members. Buchanan (1899) compared the role of the stage manager to the umpire of a game.⁵⁰ Brander Matthews (1907) wrote, “at rehearsal [the stage manager] seeks to bring about the perfect ‘team-play,’ which is absolutely necessary – the subordination of the individual display to the larger advantage of the whole performance.”⁵¹ Stage managers used a variety of strategies to correct behavior including disciplining the cast and crew with a sharp word and fining the participants on behalf of the theatre. Other times, the handbooks recommended that the stage manager remain calm and use techniques that would be associated with emotional intelligence/labor today. Fascinatingly, stage managers today are often perceived as having much more disciplinary responsibilities than they actually have. For example, the stage manager or assistant will take attendance at the beginning of rehearsal. Often, this means calling late actors to find out the reason for their absence. The stage manager may take this opportunity inappropriately to scold them for repeated infractions and the tardiness/truancy will be recorded in that evening’s report. In many colleges, student stage managers, including myself, are taught that it is the stage manager’s duty to discipline the cast for such infractions. This has certainly contributed to the us/them mentality of some theatre companies, and in many cases, have led to stage management bullies. However, AEA stage managers have no methods of discipline. Any legal disciplinary actions must come from the Producer or a representative because an AEA stage manager does not have hiring or firing capabilities. AEA has also stipulated that the stage manager should not perform any duties associated with contracts and the payment of the weekly salary, meaning stage managers do not have the power to deduct money from paychecks. This is an interesting shift as it demonstrates the continued tension between stage management history and AEA

⁵⁰ Buchanan, 41.

⁵¹ Matthews, 288.

rulings and the effect of this confusion on contemporary collegiate training programs. Despite these prohibitions, the stage managers' original disciplinary reputation continues to persevere. This impression continues to contribute to the fractious relationship between AEA actors and stage managers that has carried over into negotiations and contemporary relationships.

Stage management's supervisory role, although continuous, has shifted since 1870. As the stage manager transitioned to technical direction and production stage management, their leadership scope changed with it. C. Lang Neil (1904) remarked, "It is no use having a leader unless you follow him."⁵² Each book remarked on the stage manager's inherent leadership role in the production process. Many of the books remarked that, "The stage manager [was] ultimately responsible for the entire job"⁵³ and "The stage manager has full control behind the curtain."⁵⁴ Today, many stage managers would contend the role still involves much leadership. However, this leadership does not equate to professionalization. Often, this leadership is undermined because of the treatment of stage managers, as demonstrated in the Introduction. This leadership role was further disrupted when the Taft-Hartley Act was signed into law in 1947 because the law prohibited supervisors from collective bargaining efforts, which is a theme explored in chapter three. As a result, AEA's influence on stage management inevitably shaped the perceived and tangible ways stage management supervises. Today, the leadership of stage managers is not derived from legitimate power, as stage managers do not have hiring or firing capabilities, but instead stems from informational and referential power.

⁵² Neil, 106.

⁵³ Cole, 25.

⁵⁴ Arthur Hornblow, *Training for the Stage: Some Hints for Those About to Choose the Player's Career*, (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co.) 1916, 192.

Emotional Intelligence

From the earliest handbooks, the stage manager and prompter's reliance on emotional intelligence was a constant facet of their labor. Emotional intelligence was strongly tied to stage management's supervisory role and the perception of expertise. For the purpose of this dissertation, I am using emotional intelligence to umbrella four concepts: personality characteristics (tactfulness, patience), emotional labor meaning the manipulation of emotions, either self or others, mental labor, and the gendering of this labor.

Across the board, most stage management handbooks evoked personality characteristics to craft the ideal stage manager/prompter. The most commonly used traits were tactfulness, patience, firmness, and confidence. Neil (1904) suggested, "[A good prompter] may do more to inspire confidence among the actors than anyone else" and, "[The prompter] will always anticipate, and leave nothing to chance," with the goal of "a smooth and satisfactory performance."⁵⁵ Taylor (1916) builds on this idea noting, "Tactfully and unobtrusively, but very positively, [the stage manager] is to keep the reins in his own hands" and reminds his readers, "it is the manager with the quiet voice and the smooth manner who gets the best results."⁵⁶ In Webster and Wetzel's book (1934), the authors wrote, "Part of the stage manager's work is to see that [the crew] have nothing to distract them from good performances and that they get cooperation toward securing that extra ounce of confidence they will need for the play."⁵⁷ Cole (1937) recommends the stage manager, "Checkup tactfully on the performance of these duties. Avoid an officious attitude."⁵⁸ The stage manager should, "Foster a spirit of responsibility among

⁵⁵ Neil, 152 and 82.

⁵⁶ Taylor, 62 and 97.

⁵⁷ Webster, 122.

⁵⁸ Cole, 24.

subordinates on staff,” and have an, “Air of ‘quiet authority.’”⁵⁹ Each of these excerpts demonstrate how closely these personality traits were wrapped up in the leadership and emotional work performed by the stage manager.

The stage manager also used personality characteristics to perform emotion work. This labor entailed manipulating their own feelings in order to get or to avoid a particular reaction from the cast and crew. These tactics were introduced surprisingly early in Buchanan’s 1899 handbook, noting that the stage manager could either be “kind and gentle” or “[the stage manager] can be a holy terror when he chooses, to those who doubt his authority.”⁶⁰ Taylor (1916) offered, “Be assured also that stage managing a play is frankly exhausting work; and anybody without a good steady nerve and a good temper had best not undertake it at all. If you cannot keep cool, if you cannot retain a tone of authority without screaming and blustering, do not accept the responsibility.”⁶¹ Regulating feelings was a frequent topic in these handbooks and continues to be a growing pillar of stage management today. Bax (1936) remarked, “This is one of the most difficult tasks that confront the stage manager. He must never forget that he is dealing with adults and that some of them may be truly temperamental as opposed to being merely ill-tempered.”⁶² Stage managers were and are required to mediate their own emotions, while anticipating that the other participants will not emotionally regulate. Therefore, these handbooks recommended that the stage manager expect foul behavior and be prepared to mitigate the response. Emotional labor, which was a frequent topic in many of these handbooks, is and was largely invisible and because of this, does not garner applause or additional pay. This work can overwhelm stage managers, yet educating and training for emotional intelligence is

⁵⁹ Cole, 24.

⁶⁰ Buchanan, 41.

⁶¹ Taylor, 97.

⁶² Bax, 44.

rarely covered in a collegiate Introduction to Stage Management course. The current focus on Meyers-Briggs and other personality tests to determine personal best practices and leadership skills (although important), is not enough. Stage management training must include emotional intelligence and coping strategies for emotional labor. This calls even more attention to the ways that training needs to be restructured to reflect the forthcoming agreed upon description of stage management.

The handbooks indicate that stage managers should consider the repercussions of their relationships with cast members and be prepared to mediate differences.⁶³ Buchanan (1899) remarked, “[A really good stage manager does not] authorize the introduction of gags by one comedian and by so doing stir up jealousy in the breast of someone else who has been debarred from doing likewise.”⁶⁴ Brander Matthews (1907) added, “It is the duty of the stage-manager to control them all, to see that they are harmonious with each other, and that they are subdued to the atmosphere of the ‘production’ as a whole.”⁶⁵ The stage manager was expected to emotionally control themselves, but was also expected to regulate the emotions of the cast. The prompter was not spared from these requirements either, Dolman (1928) postulated that prompters needed to be aware of their prompting to ensure they did not annoy the actors.⁶⁶ At one point, stage managers were responsible for assigning dressing rooms, which may or may not still be the case for some theatrical companies. The handbooks recommend pairing the actors up into compatible groups to minimize potential dramatic events. Today, this emotional regulation continues to be expected, although when stage management is defined, emotional labor is not always explicitly stated.

⁶³ Buchanan, 42.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 41.

⁶⁵ Matthews, 295.

⁶⁶ Dolman, 348.

In addition to emotionally influencing the cast and crew, the stage manager in the twentieth century was expected to maintain the audience's emotions in emergency situations. Krows (1916) noted, "While this is going on [in case of fire], the stage manager steps out before the asbestos curtain is dropped to seal the proscenium opening, and delivers a short speech calculated to reassure those present."⁶⁷ Other records confirm that the stage manager often handled emergency situations, either in reassuring the audience or handling the events onstage. Webster and Wetzel (1934) wrote, "On his shoulders rests the calmness of the cast under production, the goodwill of the audience, and the eternal gratitude of the director."⁶⁸ Since the 1970s, stage management handbooks have been almost entirely focused on managing personality characteristics and emotional labor. In the final chapter of the 1974 handbook *Stage Management*, Stern compiles a list of characteristics that he feels best demonstrates good stage management:

A good stage manager assumes responsibility.

A good stage manager keeps his cool.

A good stage manager keeps his mouth shut and his eyes and ears open

A good stage manager thinks ahead

A good stage manager is considerate

A good stage manager keeps his sense of humor

A good stage manager is organized and efficient

A good stage manager is punctual and dependable.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Arthur Edwin Krows, *Play Productions in America*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company), 1916, 368.

⁶⁸ Webster, 121.

⁶⁹ Lawrence Stern, 261-272.

Many of these characteristics necessitate regulating emotions, usually with the aim of curtailing the emotional response of other theatrical workers. Stern reinterprets the stage managers' labor to center the emotional work and the relationships necessary to perform the tasks typically completed by the stage manager. Emotional labor has clearly always been a major aspect of the stage manager's work, but had not received as much attention in the handbooks until Stern refocused his text to confront the emotional labor in stage management.

Stage managers were also expected to perform anticipatory mental labor to allow the production to run smoothly. This mental labor often blends into emotional labor as the anxiety to properly prepare coincides with the stress of perfectionism. Bax noted in 1936, "Prompting is an arduous job at best and a little forethought will save the prompter from much strain. The prompter must, however, be prepared to go anywhere, even behind a small ground row in the middle of the stage."⁷⁰ Anticipatory emotional work includes thinking through the consequences of all decisions to ensure that the best choice is made. For example, according to Taylor in 1916, the stage manager needed to consider the events and personal lives of the cast and crew before making arrangements to, "avoid conflict with social events to which many of his troupe are invited or hope to be."⁷¹ Taylor contended that the stage manager should, "use both sense and tact in preparing his schedule, rehearsal must not be made to appear a burden and a bore from the start."⁷² The expectation that the directing stage manager needed to keep rehearsal interesting is startling at first, but consider how many contemporary stage management books advise the stage management team to make and provide coffee/tea to the cast and crew, or to assist in planning and executing birthday celebrations for the cast, and/or set the tone for the rehearsal. Reflecting

⁷⁰ Bax, 221.

⁷¹ Taylor, 53.

⁷² Ibid, 53.

on this history, it is no longer surprising that today there are many places and theatre cultures in the U.S. that have an expectation that stage managers will accommodate and host while performing their regular duties.

When show difficulties arise, whether it is a dropped section of text or whether that is a medical emergency, the stage manager is expected to react immediately. Bax (1936) noted, “As everyone is in rather a tense state, it is quite possible that mistakes may occur. The stage manager must make up his mind quickly whether to try to set it right or leave it alone. A good many stage mistakes are never noticed by the audience, but a clumsy correction inevitably is. The stage manager must always be thinking ahead of everyone else, but not so intently as to miss present duties.”⁷³ William Perdue Halstead (1937) rationalized that the stage manager had, “a far better chance of making a reasoned choice of lines than have the actors, who are under high mental stress trying to straighten out the jumbled lines. Sometimes the prompter can tell an actor about to enter to include in one of his speeches an omitted fact essential to the sense of the scene.”⁷⁴ Halstead continues, “Do not expect in such circumstances to be able to make the dialogue read perfectly smoothly. It is in such situations that a prompter must show judgement and quick-wittedness in order to obviate blemishes to the performances.”⁷⁵ In these situations, the stage manager is tasked with compounding emotional and mental labor to make the most of these situations. The stage manager is expected to keep tight control of their own emotions, while diffusing any tensions on and off stage with the aim of keeping the audience unaware that such an event has taken place. On top of that, the stage manager must quickly consider all of the repercussions of the event in hopes of fixing potential issues before the audience notices or the

⁷³ Bax, 235.

⁷⁴ William Perdue Halstead, *Stage Management for Amateur Theatre*, (New York: F.S. Crofts & Co.) 1937, 200-201.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 201.

cast panics. Much of this emotional and mental labor is implied through the duties of stage management, but it is rarely recognized or discussed by our colleagues or employers.

Contrary to the common belief that stage management has always been a man's career, several of these books comment on how female stage managers were better suited to the work due to their disposition. Much of the writing on the subject was steeped in misogyny as it assumes that only women could perform certain duties well, equating ill-temper and rash behavior as male-dominated traits and tactfulness and patience to female-dominated traits. Given emotional labor's longevity and appearance in almost every handbook since 1870, this disparity between our perceived history and the reality of what was written is fascinating. In Webster and Wetzel's book (1934), the authors wrote, "She, for the duties cry for the influence of a "she" - is sometimes known as the prompter, but in a well-directed play her duty as a prompter should be negligible."⁷⁶ And in Peter Bax's (1936) work, he wrote, "Women generally make better prompters than men, probably for the same reasons that make them better nurses. Indeed the prompter has much in common with the nurse, both having to give aid to people under great stress."⁷⁷ Halstead also dedicates several pages to the topic in his 1937 handbook.⁷⁸ It should also be no surprise that shortly after Stern (1974) flipped the narrative in stage management handbooks to focus on the emotional labor, that the field promptly followed suit and, according to anecdotal stories, women "began" joining the field.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Webster, 119.

⁷⁷ Bax, 37.

⁷⁸ Halstead, 23-25.

⁷⁹ There is an existing belief that female stage managers were extremely rare before the 1980s when women began joining the field. AEA records show that approximately 10% of those that joined the first Stage Managers' Association in 1947 had female-sounding names. This percentage corresponds with the percentage of female-sounding names listed on stage management memos from the 1940s. According to the *2019 Stage Manager Survey* female-identifying stage managers create the majority in younger generations. See: David J McGraw and Tara Patterson, *2019 Stage Manager Survey*, (SM-Sim, LLC: April 2020) http://www.smsurvey.info/uploads/6/4/6/6/6466686/2019_stage_manager_survey.pdf, 16-17.

The lengthy association between stage management activities and emotional intelligence validates this labor as being a core principal that must be included in the definition of stage management. However, emotional labor can perpetuate harm and trauma without proper support systems. Jenna Ward and Robert McMurray co-authored *The Dark Side of Emotional Labor* (2015), which analyzed aspects of emotional labor that were uncomfortable, challenging, unspoken, and hidden. In their book, the duo argued for an ethics of care, asking where does the responsibility of the emotional laborer lie? The pair contended that emotional labor often resulted in burnout, disengagement, and outright resistance. By instituting an ethics of care, the employer could develop a culture in which the individual felt acknowledged and celebrated.⁸⁰ The stage management field must also question and dismantle sections of implied emotional labor, including perceived perfectionism, so that it does not perpetuate harm and trauma in the field. This calls for extensive training and perhaps continuing education opportunities for new and veteran stage managers alike. In addition, training programs should consider how they are currently training their students to prepare for this emotional labor and critically consider what ways the professors may improve upon such research and training.

CONCLUSION

Through careful analysis of the phrases, descriptions and tasks associated with the stage manager, prompter and assistant stage manager in these guidebooks, historians can track the development of these jobs over the course of the late-nineteenth and twentieth century. Wilensky notes that many professions change the name of the occupation in order to raise the field's reputation or reduce identification with the previous, less professional occupation.⁸¹ The field

⁸⁰ Jenna Ward and Robert McMurray, *The Dark Side of Emotional Labour*, (London: Routledge), 2015.

⁸¹ Wilensky, 144.

changed the title associated with contemporary stage management duties from “prompter” to “assistant stage manager” to “stage manager” in order to raise the perceived status of the field. This research clarifies how the modern stage manager developed into the role that it is today.

An examination of stage management handbooks also demonstrates the progressive divide between British and U.S. stage management. As I researched, I noticed that the handbooks published in London or by self-identified British stage managers described a vastly different characterization of stage management after the 1930s, including the use of differing titles. The introduction of the director changed theatrical hierarchy in the United States, but also represented the continued divergence from British theatre. Peter Bax, a London Stage Manager, describes this in his 1936 handbook titled *Stage Management*, “Both in England and America the title of stage director is used. In England this means the stage manager of some very large theatre, such as Drury Lane, or one who is as much a producer as a stage manager. In America the stage director is usually the man who stages the play, while the title of producer stands for the man who finances and/or manages the whole concern.”⁸² Bax notes that in 1936, stage managers were not under British Actors’ Equity Association contracts unless they were also acting in the show they stage managed.⁸³ Perhaps one reason for this was because of the continued association between stage management and producing duties. This was supported in Dolman’s book (1928) where he wrote, “[the stage manager] represents the employer - in effect, is the employer.”⁸⁴ By contrast, U.S. AEA mandated in 1920 that all AEA companies have an AEA stage manager for each production, which ultimately separated stage management from the producers. Since U.S. stage management was readily incorporated into AEA from its founding, that has meant that

⁸² Bax, 20.

⁸³ Ibid, 20.

⁸⁴ Dolman, 341.

AEA has had influence and authority over the field as a whole. If AEA had not changed its contractual language, stage management may have continued on a path similar to British stage management. Interestingly, today's British Equity Association and Australia's Equity Association are not limited to only actors and actually represent actors, directors, choreographers, stage managers and other theatrical personnel.⁸⁵

Instead, AEA asserted its control over the field and perpetuated the impression that stage managers were actors with additional responsibilities for far longer than any of these handbooks suggest. On the other hand, British stage management handbooks continued associating technical knowledge and labor to the stage manager between 1936 and 1990. In the *Stage Management and Theatre Administration* handbook published in London by Schirmer Books Theatre Manuals in 1988, the stage manager or production stage manager is described as a "senior member of the SM team" who "controls props/furniture budget" and "sometimes finds props, fits up and paints the set," among other tasks. Whereas, the deputy stage manager (DSM) or first assistant SM is described as "in charge of the prompt script; running rehearsals; cueing the show, and dealing with paper work involved."⁸⁶ While further analysis is required, it is important to note the effects of AEA and U.S. labor law on the differing trajectory of British and U.S. stage management in terms of titles as well as labor.

The publication process allowed individual stage managers and educators to continue to influence the defining and redefining process. Many of these handbooks were reprinted multiple times over the next fifty years, allowing some of these authors to continue to impact the field

⁸⁵ This could be a potential area of expansion. A future project may look into the founding and development of each of these organizations and their relationship with their stage management community. Such a project could illuminate the ways that each organization influenced stage management while mediating local labor laws. For example, assessing the ways that Taft-Hartley Act predisposed AEA.

⁸⁶ Pauline Menear, Terry Hawkins, and David Mayer. *Stage Management and Theatre Administration*. (New York, N.Y.: Schirmer Books), 1989.

long after the initial publication. However, these publications, though in conversation with one another, were not representative of field-wide agreement. In order for stage management to achieve professionalization in the future, the stage managers must engage in a field-wide conversation to critically consider the role of the stage manager in historical and contemporary theatre.

The adaptability and flexibility of stage management should be celebrated and admired as stage managers pivot to fill in the gaps created by shifts in theatre-making. However, this adaptability should not be allowed to hinder or undermine the professionalization process or the field's intention to define itself. In recent years, stage managers have discussed and perhaps feared that the stage management field would become futile because of A.I. and/or automatic cues. This research has demonstrated that stage management has a long-tradition of adapting to the needs of the theatrical process. This is corroborated by current anecdotal evidence that stage managers actively pivoted during the pandemic to adapt their skills in new and interesting ways as theatre-making moved online and into other physically-restricted processes.

Stage management's ultimate definition should address the fundamental role of the stage manager in the production process. As a starting point, I suggest the following definition: Stage managers are trained specialists who prioritize and advocate for the production/production process itself. Stage managers lead, facilitate and safeguard the production from pre-production to closing adhering to the following types of labor: interdepartmental collaboration, idiosyncratic administration, artistic leadership and bookkeeping/archival work.

In sum, it is the stage manager's main priority to safeguard the production and production process. Some may debate that everyone working on the production aims to protect the production itself; however, I would argue that many of those people are actually only focused on

their piece of the production puzzle. This includes the director, who is focused on bringing their vision to reality, the production manager whose priority is the budget of the production, and the producer or artistic director who is caught up in the commercialization process. The *New York Times* wrote in 1901, “It is the province of the stage manager to view the whole object. He must see all the different parts and recognize their importance. But he must also recognize their relation to each other, both as to position and proportion, and must insist upon the maintenance of that relation.”⁸⁷ Gruver (1952) concluded, “The stage manager’s duties lie between these two branches of the production team. He is a link between ideas and actualities.”⁸⁸ As we see in many of these handbooks, the stage manager facilitates the production process and is focused on the big picture goal of getting the production to the finishing line.

The stage manager’s purpose is further evidenced when the stage manager faces challenges. If the stage manager arrives at tech and the scenic elements are not complete, the stage manager must collaborate with the production team to decide how to best use the day. This may include canceling the actors and allowing the scenic department an additional day on stage, or it may mean working with the scenic elements available and moving through the script as best as possible. Ultimately, the stage manager has the executive power to make the decision. In all likelihood, the decision will be mostly agreed upon by major parties because of the stage manager’s highly valued emotional intelligence. This purpose also justifies the reason for the stage managers’ emotional labor. In conflicts between cast members or production team members, the stage manager is often called upon to mediate the dispute. In many cases, the stage manager’s objective in that moment is how to quickly resolve the issue so that the production

⁸⁷ Edward P. Temple, “Tricks of the Stage Manager’s Trade” *New York Times*, September 15, 1901.

⁸⁸ Bert Gruver, *The Stage Managers Handbook*, (New York: DBS Publishers, Inc.,) 1953, x-xi.

process can continue. In the future, stage managers must reconsider problem-solving protocols to ensure that stage managers are not perpetuating harmful microaggressions. Stage managers need to adjust their definition of “what is best for the production and production process” to include the health and needs of their team members. The four types of labor presented at the end of my definition are suggestions for ways to build in the major fragments that equate to the stage manager’s labor. Interdepartmental collaboration includes the communication and the generation of paperwork shared between departments and the stage manager’s role as liaison between the cast and production team and theatre administrative staff. Idiosyncratic administration umbrellas the idea that the stage manager assess and manages each production on its own needs and desires, allowing the stage management team to assess if a props list or costume plot is truly necessary. Artistic leadership encompasses the idea that stage managers inspire by influencing feelings, through relationships and emotional intelligence. Bookkeeping/archival work references the labor associated with putting together the promptbook for rehearsals and performances. This can also include the labor required to create a production promptbook for archival or revival purposes. By further developing each of these sections, the stage management community can establish boundaries around typical protocols and policies and create training modules to properly prepare future stage managers for the job at hand.

Stage management should also critically consider how we are already commodifying success. In other words, what does it mean to succeed at stage managing? After achieving professionalization, what means of gatekeeping will be used. For now, there is an assumption that success is only achieved with several long-standing Broadway contracts, which perpetuates the notion that AEA Broadway theatre credits are the only ones that count. While arbitrating the field’s professionalization, stage managers must reassess the criteria for success. This chapter

prepares us to examine the key concerns in chapters two and three as the stage management community transitioned its professionalization ambitions to their professional organization, Actors' Equity Association.

CHAPTER 2:

STAGE MANAGER AS ACTOR: A PROBLEMATIC ORIGIN STORY

On January 26th, 2020 Kate Shindle, current Actors' Equity Association (AEA) president, publicly tweeted, "Dear @ActorsEquity Members: Like you, I'm sick of hearing about theatres putting their staff on our SM contracts for the health insurance. We can't control who's hired, but if they're not doing legit SM work, we sure can report it as insurance fraud. Call your rep. Love, Kate."¹ Since I joined Actors' Equity in 2012, only two of my contracts have required an AEA ASM. Both of these AEA ASM contracts were filled with individuals associated with the theatre company and neither had previous ASM experience. An additional five contracts hired college students as production assistants² in lieu of ASMs and another four contracts did not offer any assistants at all. Some producers put theatre staff on Stage Management contracts.³ Other producers combine the ASM contract with an understudy position, especially on tours, and then hire the ASM/understudy for their acting skills rather than previous ASM experience.⁴ As a result, the stage manager is forced to choose between teaching the ASM/understudy basic stage management skills or completing ASM tasks unaided. Evidence of such practices are anecdotally criticized in contemporary stage management social circles because hiring staff for stage

¹ Kate Shindle, Twitter Post, January 2020, 5:36 p.m., <http://twitter.com/AEAPresident>

² In theory, Production Assistants are stage-managers-in-training similar to interns and often work for free or for a small stipend. Some Production Assistants, specifically those at larger regional theatres and Broadway make an hourly minimum wage. There is often an implied educational component, wherein the stage manager teaches the production assistant about the job.

³ For example, the General Manager for Berkshire Theatre Group doubled as ASM for their recent production of *Godspell* in August 2020, which coincidentally was the first AEA approved production to open after the Covid-19 pandemic shut theatres down across the country. While this General Manager/ASM has stage management experience, this is not always the case. In addition, some stage managers add their concern that such a duality of roles could cause a conflict of interest. *Godspell*, Berkshire Theatre Group, August 6 - September 4, 2020, accessed: Aug 23, 2020, <https://www.berkshiretheatregroup.org/the-naughton-family-in-concert/>, pg. 11.

⁴ Amanda Spooner, "Why." Posted on Year of the Stage Manager 2020/21 on Facebook, May 23, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/709114496283521/posts/1061312967730337>.

management positions creates potential conflicts of interest. In addition, the hiring of inexperienced ASMs cause the stage manager to have a larger work load. The 2019 Stage Management Survey⁵ revealed that 33% of respondents were dissatisfied with work/life balance and one respondent noted, “if productions cannot succeed without stage management carrying the show on our backs to the point of exhaustion and burnout, things need to change.”⁶ In addition, the respondents who were most likely to leave the profession in the next year, noted that the two primary reasons for leaving the field were burnout from long hours and burnout from high stress, both of which are natural outcomes when vetted and trained ASMs are not hired.⁷

Shindle’s tweet calls on the individual to disclose illegal work practices, but AEA failed stage management when the union hindered the field’s professionalization process early in the twentieth century. Harold L. Wilensky’s fourth and fifth steps of professionalization (legal regulation and eliminating the unqualified/unscrupulous) are two key steps that could prevent these problematic labor practices. Currently, AEA does not mandate that its members or potential members meet any qualifications before signing a contract.⁸ Theatrical unions, however, do have precedents for legal and disciplinary regulation: the United Scenic Artists (USA) requires members to submit an exam/portfolio review for each discipline the individual

⁵ The Stage Management Survey has been conducted seven times since 2006 by David J. McGraw. The survey is conducted digitally through email, social media, and word of mouth. It is open to any stage manager who has stage managed at least three productions in the United States and tracks current stage management trends. The survey results are published on <http://smsurvey.info> and promoted on several backstage theatre publications including *Stage Directions Magazine*.

⁶ David J McGraw and Tara Patterson, *2019 Stage Manager Survey*, (SM-Sim, LLC: April 2020) http://www.smsurvey.info/uploads/6/4/6/6/6466686/2019_stage_manager_survey.pdf, 42.

⁷ Ibid, 44.

⁸ This stance makes sense for actors. Acting is an intuitive art based on individual aesthetic and the director or casting director should have the right to decide who is best suited for their show. Stage management is a completely different field, which would benefit from a qualifications policy. Historically, AEA has maintained a strong desire to ensure “equal” treatment for all members, arguing that a qualifications policy would cause a divide between actors and stage managers.

wishes to join and IATSE calls members based on their seniority/hours worked.⁹ As we shall see, the stage management community has been pleading with AEA for over 80 years for a qualifications policy. Some ideas that have been offered include a competency test, apprenticeship, or portfolio to demonstrate an individual's proven abilities to stage manage.

Instead of aiding stage management in its professionalization process, AEA repressed the field in the 1940s and mandated that stage managers were actors first and foremost, effectively forestalling the development of a professional stage management community.¹⁰ The field has yet to recover. Even today, AEA has yet to formally define what "stage management" means in union policies.¹¹ The 2020-2021: Year of the Stage Manager campaign focused much of its January 2020 online programming to unpack the field's definition because of widespread discrepancies and misunderstandings even amongst theatrical practitioners.¹² AEA's negation of a formalized definition contributed to stage management's failure at professionalization in the early twentieth century. Building on Wilensky's professionalization theory, this chapter

⁹ In other words, someone who joins USA by submitting a light design portfolio would not be allowed to take a USA contract for scenic design without also passing the scenic design exam/portfolio review; IATSE allows locals to create their own qualifications policies, some require competence exams before starting work, others have different policies. In general, most IATSE locals call members who have worked the most hours on IATSE contracts first before reaching out to members with less seniority/experience.

¹⁰ Correspondence from Bert Lytell, Walter N. Greaza, Rebecca Brownstein, Paul Dullzell, Paul N. Turner to Council, 2 March 1942, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 6; folder 32; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹¹ Some contracts list prohibited tasks and/or a list of tasks the stage manager is allowed to perform for extra pay, but a formal definition or list of tasks/expectations is not included.

¹² This is a short list of a few examples from the Year of the Stage Manager Public Facebook Group: Amanda Spooner, "What do you wish people knew about being an Assistant Stage Manager?", Facebook, Jan 21, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/709114496283521>

Amanda Spooner, "What do you wish DIRECTORS knew about Stage Managers?" Facebook, Jan 23, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/709114496283521>

Amanda Spooner, "Are Stage Managers ARTISTS? Positive, front-facing thoughts are the most treasured. I'll start below. Facebook, Jan 27, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/709114496283521>

Amanda Spooner, "Do Stage Managers manage the morale of a company? Should they?" Facebook, Feb 23, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/709114496283521>

Amanda Spooner, "Since we are talking about the SM job description (or lack thereof) I am curious how this phrase makes you feel...*Stage Management is like porn... you know it when you see it.** Truly curious about your thoughts. xx" Facebook, May 12, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/709114496283521>

examines stage management specific-AEA records to consider how the concomitant professionalization of AEA effected the professionalization of stage management. In doing so, this chapter reframes AEA's historical narrative to include the stage management community. I use letters, memos, contracts, and meeting minutes to illustrate the small ways that AEA's definition of stage management resisted change over time. AEA's historical resistance and failure to acknowledge that stage management was a definitive and separate field continues to allow AEA to concede stage management issues at the bargaining table, leaving contemporary stage managers unprotected.

THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION

AEA originally formed in December 1912 as a professional organization, not as a labor union. The association aimed to correct abuses and generate a uniform contract through arbitration and mediation, tactics that are traditionally associated with professional organizations, rather than striking and bargaining, which are methods touted by unions.¹³ However, the group had little success as a professional organization because AEA demands were ignored by the producers. It is commonly understood that the 1919 AEA strike, which spread to eight cities, closed/prevented the opening of 53 plays, and lasted 30 days, was a major turning point for the organization.¹⁴ The decisions that led to the 1919 AEA strike also steered AEA's structure towards a hybrid professional model, which allowed unionization and professional organization to be mutually defining categories.

¹³ Leslie B. Alexander. "Professionalization and unionization: compatible after all?" *Social Work*, 25, no.6 (1980): 478. 16-05-2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23711678>

¹⁴ Blanket Response Letter from AEA, Feb. 1, 1969; Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

Performing arts unions were necessary because of the increasing exploitation of theatrical workers. New technology and other inventions changed the backstage hierarchy to become more complex as more bodies were needed, but not always supplied, and special training was required. The payment schedule for theatrical workers did not change even though the production process transitioned from very few rehearsals to heavily relying on several weeks of rehearsals. This meant the theatrical workers went weeks without pay during rehearsals and had few protections against the exploitation of their labor. Unfair working conditions bred instability and discontent among theatrical workers, emboldening them to form collectives and demonstrate solidarity. Actors and stage managers were stranded in cities hundreds or thousands of miles from their homes and were required to pay their own way with no guarantee of payment or stable income. Rehearsals were unpaid, yet compulsory, and the rehearsal period was growing longer and longer. If an actor or stage manager was hired to play a role and fired before opening, they received no payment for any work performed. With few labor laws and very little protection, theatrical workers united with their colleagues, forming theatrical unions in the late nineteenth century. In 1896, actors and stage managers¹⁵ joined together to form the Actors' Society in hopes of staging a revolt against producers, including the Theatrical Syndicate.¹⁶ Unfortunately, the Actors' Society was disastrously ineffective because the society was considered a community social group and had little professional power.¹⁷

Recognizing the Actors' Society's failure, the remaining members led by Howard Kyle, Albert Bruning, Frank Gillmore, Charles D. Coburn, William Harcourt and Milton Sills dissolved the group on December 23, 1912 and reformed as Actors' Equity Association with the

¹⁵ Reminder, this is the director-stage manager before the transitions described in Chapter 1. They often acted in leading shows, which is why they were included in the organization.

¹⁶ Alfred Harding, *Revolt against the actors*, (New York, William Morrow & Company, 1929) pg. 10.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 10; Sean P. Holmes, *Weavers of Dreams, Unite!* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2013), Pg. 32.

“endeavor to uphold and advance the dignity of our calling.”¹⁸ In other words, AEA’s mission was to increase the field’s professionalization. They held their first organizational meeting on May 26, 1913.¹⁹ In the introduction to the articles of agreement, constitution, and by-laws the authors wrote, “We, the undersigned, all being persons of full age, hereby constitute ourselves a voluntary Association to advance, promote, foster, and benefit the profession of acting and the condition of persons engaged therein...”²⁰ In doing so, the association established their desire to create a professional organization as defined by Wilensky. “Francis Wilson, president of the Actors’ Equity Association, had stated in August, 1913: ‘The Actors’ Equity Association is not per se a labor union, and it will never become one unless, which is not likely, flagrant injustice on the part of managers compels it to ally itself with organized labor.’”²¹ This direct quote from the first president of AEA reveals that the association’s original intent was professionalization, not unionization. It also indicates that the major players in AEA understood the importance of professionalization for both the association and its actors and stage managers.

For five years, Actors’ Equity Association worked as a professional organization trying to secure a working contract through mediation and arbitration with the producer’s association, United Managers’ Protective Association (UMPA), which included the Theatrical Syndicate, the Shubert’s, and other independent producers. In 1917, the UMPA signed an initial contract with AEA, but largely ignored any contractual obligations. Dr. Paul Fleming Gemmill, a leading author of highly successful economic textbooks in the early twentieth century and professor at the University of Pennsylvania, took special interest in AEA’s unionization process, publishing

¹⁸ Constitution/Rule Book, 1914, Actors’ Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 1; folder 2; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, pg 9-11.

¹⁹ *All For One and One For All* (New York: Actors’ Equity Association, 1924), 17-18.

²⁰ Constitution/Rule Book, 1914, pg 16.

²¹ Paul Fleming Gemmill, *Collective Bargaining by Actors: A Study of Trade-Unionism Among Performers of the English Speaking Legitimate Stage in America* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1926) pg 10.

several articles and pamphlets on the collective bargaining efforts by actors. In a 1926 economic pamphlet, Gemmill contended that, “One of the more outspoken of the managers, Mr. William A. Brady very frankly said: ‘your Actors’ Equity Association contract is absolutely fair, but I’ll never adopt it until I am forced to.’”²² Gemmill argues in his report that AEA aligned with the AFL because the producing managers were absolutely resistant to arbitration and mediation leaving AEA no choice but to align itself with the labor unions as a means of getting a standard contract. According to Gemmill, just prior to the 1919 strike, AEA and the Producing Managers’ Association (PMA) disagreed on the arbitration process.²³ The PMA wanted to keep arbitration between the individual actor/stage manager and the producer and did not want AEA’s involvement in the arbitration process. In a press statement AEA argued, “[The PMA’s] offer merely means that the actor would be compelled again to fight his own battles against the managers’ powerful organization without the assistance and backing of his organization.”²⁴ In other words, the Producing Managers’ Association refused the right of the actors and stage managers to bargain and arbitrate collectively through their professional organization, the Actor’s Equity Association.²⁵ Instead, AEA turned to a transitional model, where a union organization is temporarily used to achieve professionalization. Since the PMA refused to recognize AEA as a professional organization, AEA turned to the American Federation of Labor (AFL) for assistance.

Many organizational behavior scholars argue that unions and professional organizations are antithetical, which is perhaps one reason AEA’s first president would vehemently proclaim

²² Gemmill, *Collective Bargaining*, pg. 4.

²³ UMPA and PMA are arguably the same organizations: UMPA dissolved in 1919 so that the producers could create a new organization and restart negotiations with AEA. See Kerry Segrave, *Actors Organize: A History of Union Formation Efforts in America, 1880-1919* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), 152.

²⁴ Gemmill, *Collective Bargaining*, 9.

²⁵ *Ibid*, pg. 10

that affiliating AEA with the labor movement would be a last resort.²⁶ The structures, methods and desires of each organization type, if judged by ideal standards, are inherently incompatible. Leslie Alexander, a contemporary social scientist, wrote about the professionalization of unionized social workers in the 1980s and described a few of these differences here: “The classic tactics of unions, which emerge from their basic and open power struggles with management, involve a range of applications of power – from slowdowns to pickets to strikes. ... Professional associations, on the other hand, are not as blatantly involved in power struggles but rather emphasize more cerebral tactics, such as developing codes of ethics, raising standards of practice, promoting good community relations, and expanding the knowledge base.”²⁷

In a blanket response letter about AEA’s early history, the association claims, “Perhaps the most original and outstanding contribution which Equity made to the labor movement was the inclusion, from the beginning, of the principal of arbitration of all disputes arising out of the contract. It was the first time that any organization of employees had ever been willing to trust the conditions of their employment, and the interpretation of those conditions, to arbitration.”²⁸ A look at AEA’s early history indicates that the organization initially intended to avoid striking and other such power moves that were typically associated with union organizations. Instead AEA sought to use methods connected with professional organizations. Regrettably, AEA failed at professionalization through the professional organization and therefore turned to the labor movement to explore alternative pathways to achieve a standard contract.

Alexander argues in the article “Professionalization and unionization: compatible after all?” that professionalization and unionization are not always opposites of each other. She uses

²⁶ Alexander, 478.

²⁷ Ibid, 478.

²⁸ Blanket Letter from AEA, 1969.

two additional models to explain the paradigm shift. The first is a transitional model where a union is created temporarily to achieve professionalization and the second is the hybrid model where an organization is part union, part professional organization. The transitional model assumes that the field will eventually reject unionization in favor of its achieved professionalization. Alexander maintains that the transitional model ignores reality because “social workers, teachers, nurses and librarians have not rejected unionization,”²⁹ or terminated the field’s relationship with their unions, despite having achieved professionalization. She uses social work as an example to argue that the transitional model is too optimistic, noting that the field’s aspiration of a professionalized status is an ideology rather than a reality. Alexander also argues that the transitional model fails to take into account a variety of circumstances including environmental constraints and “inevitable interactional process: when unions and professionals interact over time, unions become more professional and professionals become more proletarian.”³⁰ Instead, Alexander argues, the hybrid model is better suited to describe union affiliated professional organizations because it takes these three items into account. The hybrid approach “assumes that many occupations aspiring to professional status will not achieve it in the traditional sense of the word,” and instead should “be judged on their own merits.”³¹ In AEA’s case, the association needed to restructure as a union to achieve bargaining power through striking after which the association achieved professionalization. Like teaching, nursing and other unionized professional fields, AEA has since followed the hybrid approach. As noted by Alexander, stage management is unlikely to reach professionalization in the term’s traditional definition, as discussed in the introduction of this dissertation. However, stage management

²⁹ Alexander, 479.

³⁰ Ibid, 479.

³¹ Ibid, 479.

should continue to seek professionalization so that the field can garner eminence, which would aid stage managers in the bargaining process.

Failing at peacefully arbitrating with the PMA as a professional organization, AEA eagerly turned to the American Federation of Labor (AFL) for support. The White Rats of America, which represented white male vaudeville performers, had already chartered with the AFL and had been granted jurisdiction over all theatrical entertainers. The White Rats mandated that any AEA member who wanted the protection of the AFL should terminate their relationship with AEA and be absorbed into the White Rats organization. AEA members recognized that the contractual desires of vaudeville performers were inherently different than those of “legitimate” theatre because vaudeville performers held a degree of control over their artform as both creator and performer, making the “legitimate” actor more susceptible to producer abuses.³² In addition, “the very idea of being referred to as ‘White Rats’ was anathema”³³ to many AEA members seeking to professionalize the field. They were right to fear joining. The White Rats organization suffered a devastating loss against the Vaudeville Managers’ Protective Association in 1916, after which, its membership dwindled and led to financial ruin.³⁴ Once the White Rats had given up their charter, AEA turned again to the AFL for assistance.

Wanting to avoid another jurisdictional conflict, the AFL agreed in July 1919 to charter AEA under the Associated Actors and Artistes of America (AAAA or 4As), which would allow other performing unions to join the AFL, under the 4As umbrella. According to the organization’s biographical record at the Tamiment Library and Robert F. Wagner Labor

³² Holmes, 49.

³³ Ibid, 49.

³⁴ Robert Snyder, *The Voice of the City: Vaudeville and Popular Culture in New York*, (New York: Oxford Press, 1989), 76-79; For more on White Rats union see, Kerry Segrave. *Actors Organize, A History of Union Formation Efforts in America, 1880-1919*. (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2008).

Archives, “The main purpose of the Four A's since its founding has been to represent the affiliates' common interests, and to resolve jurisdictional problems between and among them, and in regard to individual actors working a range of entertainment sectors.”³⁵ The creation of the 4As allowed AEA to begin the task of defining itself and its jurisdiction of actors (and eventually stage managers) on the legitimate stage, an important component to Wilensky’s theory of professionalization.

After fruitless negotiations and an investigation that disclosed that only 20% of its producing members used the agreed upon contract, AEA switched from a professional organization to a trade union.³⁶ With support from the AFL, AEA immediately organized the 1919 strike against the Producing Managers’ Association (PMA).³⁷ Gemmill notes:

The players fought a hard fight, but they were not called upon to fight alone. Experienced leaders of the American Federation of Labor addressed mass meetings and aided in conducting the campaign. The officials of the American Artistes’ Federation, the vaudeville branch of the Associated Actors and Artistes of America, forbade their members to perform in any theater against which the legitimate actors were striking. The Actors’ Association of Great Britain instructed its members to act in harmony with the Actors’ Equity Association. Baggage handlers refused to handle theatrical baggage without an O.K. from the Actors’ Equity Association. The International Alliance of Billposters and Billers

³⁵ “Guide to the Associated Actors and Artistes of America WAG.110,” The Tamiment Library & Richard F. Wagner Labor Records, New York University, August 10, 2020, http://dlib.nyu.edu/findingaids/html/tamwag/wag_110/bioghist.html.

³⁶ Segrave, 154.

³⁷ UMPA and PMA are arguably the same organizations: UMPA dissolved so that the producers could create a new organization and restart negotiations with AEA. See Kerry Segrave, *Actors Organize: A History of Union Formation Efforts in America, 1880-1919* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008), 152.

of the United States and Canada refused to post bills in New York until the strike was settled.³⁸

Members of the stage employees and musicians' unions also supported the AEA strike, effectively closing four theatres in August 1919.³⁹ These sympathy strikes are illegal today, banned in 1947 by the Taft-Hartley Act, which was passed to curb the power of unions demonstrated through solidarity. However, this overwhelming support led to AEA's success in both its intent to strike, but also in forcing the PMA to recognize them as a professional organization. The strike spread to numerous cities and lasted several weeks.⁴⁰ The membership for Actors' Equity doubled before the PMA formally agreed to negotiations with the union. In the wake of this strike, the Chorus Equity Association was founded, AEA created the Actors' Benefit Fund to assist actors who were out of work, and the PMA struck back at AEA in the form of a \$6 million lawsuit.⁴¹ This strike serves as the turning point for AEA's professionalization process, wherein the Producers' union was forced to confront AEA's authority as the voice of legitimate actors and stage managers.⁴²

With the end of the strike came a renewed sense of professionalization as a union. As Gemmill noted, "certainly the actors had cause for rejoicing, for they won a five-year agreement recognizing definitely the right of the 'Actor's Equity Association to represent its members in their dealings with the managers, and providing for a standard minimum contract and the arbitration of all disputes.'"⁴³ The ramifications of this new status allowed AEA the ability to

³⁸ Gemmill, *Collective Bargaining*, pg. 11-12.

³⁹ *Ibid*, pg. 11-12

⁴⁰ Blanket Letter from AEA, 1969.

⁴¹ Segrave, 161.

⁴² Reminder – stage managers were largely acting in the shows they stage managed at the time. At this point stage managers were just starting to turn their directing duties to directors and focus on the technical oversight of the production.

⁴³ Paul F. Gemmill, "Equity: Trade Union," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 41, No. 1, (1926):129-145, Accessed: August 8, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1885555>, pg 131-132.

represent their members and negotiate effectively at the bargaining table. Gemmill also states, “For not only has the Actors' Equity Association proved to be ‘practicable,’ but it may be questioned whether any other union has, in so short a time, gained so fully its stated ends.”⁴⁴ Within two months of joining the AFL, AEA achieved its goal of a standard contract and the right to arbitrate on behalf of its members. In this fight for the right to arbitrate, the by-product forced the producing association to partially recognize Actors' Equity Association as the professional organization it was.

The hybrid model of organization recognizes that most professions will not achieve full professional status, which was originally referenced by Wilensky and later the subject of Alexander's unionization compatibility article. Instead these associations blend the traditional union and traditional professional model to create a different form. Alexander argues that these merged models should be judged on their own merits. In regards to collective bargaining, Alexander notes that “bargaining units in professional unions often tend to be smaller and more scattered; they also have a tendency – with teachers a primary exception – to reject the use of strikes and other more extreme pressure tactics in favor of arbitration and mediation.”⁴⁵ In AEA's case, that has meant the union has focused on smaller bargaining units representing different sized contracts. In the beginning it was primarily the “Standard Minimum Contract,” but year after year AEA has added a variety of contracts including Summer Stock, League of Resident Theatre (LORT), Small Professional Theatre (SPT), Production, and Theatre for Young Audience (TYA) contracts. Had AEA allowed stage managers to build their own bargaining unit and contract in the early twentieth century, stage managers would have been able to negotiate their own professionalization, definition and labor expectations. This process would be daunting

⁴⁴ Gemmill, “Equity,” 129.

⁴⁵ Alexander, 480.

if undertaken today considering the 70 different contractual agreements in AEA's rulebook library. Each would need to be re-negotiated to acknowledge the use of a separate stage management contract. Despite this, the potential benefits of a stage management contract could be promising for the professionalization of stage management and, therefore, the future of the field.

AEA achieved its professionalization through the hybrid model, merging unionization with the professional organization to attain a working contract for its members. AEA met most of Wilensky's step three by defining and redefining its jurisdiction through the 4As. In the early twentieth century, the union tirelessly fought amongst themselves and against the producers for a "closed shop," which would have prevented non-union members from working as actors and stage managers, thus meeting the second and third phases for Wilensky's step three. The "closed shop" was arguably achieved in the 1924 negotiation, but was short-lived and eventually outlawed with the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act. In February 1936, AEA published an editorial in *Equity* magazine, remarking on the union's professionalization: "When the difficult days of the depression forced Equity to go to the City Hall in New York and, later, to the capitol at Washington it found that its reputation had preceded it and was no small asset to its program of relief projects for its members."⁴⁶ While AEA's professionalization solidified when standing before Congress, at the negotiating table, and in the eyes of its members, this professionalization was not extended to the field of stage management. AEA made small gestures, adding stage management to the contractual language, but, as seen in the next section, firmly resisted acknowledging the field's unique role in theatrical productions.

⁴⁶ "Editorial," *Equity Magazine*, February 1936, 1.

THE FIGHT AND FAILURE TO PROFESSIONALIZE STAGE MANAGEMENT

The establishment of the 4As as an umbrella organization allowed and continues to allow the possibility that stage managers could have left AEA and formed their own union with continued support from the AFL, as the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) and the American Guild of Variety Artists (AGVA) have done. Prior to the founding of SAG and AGVA, founded in 1933 and 1939 respectively, AEA published articles in their *Equity* magazine arguing for jurisdiction over those groups. The idea that stage managers could have successfully left the union and maintained access to the AFL's support fed AEA's fear that professionalized stage managers would leave AEA. Stage management's departure would have financially weakened the organization and potentially generated a division between actors and stage managers. This rift would have been detrimental for actors because stage managers oversaw the implementation of union rules in the work place. If the stage management community had left AEA, the field could have aligned itself with the producers, which would have undermined AEA and the union's influence on the workplace. As the old adage says, keep your friends close and your enemies closer, AEA fought to keep control over stage managers, giving just enough to keep them satisfied while simultaneously deterring any attempts at organizing. Instead of assisting stage managers in their professionalization, AEA leadership used this argument to inhibit the professionalization of stage management.

Stage managers have had a long history both on and off the stage. While many stage managers were the leading actors and actresses of their productions in the nineteenth century, the transition from the directing-stage manager to the production stage manager was at its apogee in the early years of the union. In 1919, when AEA's professionalization was achieved, stage managers were starting to focus on the technical demands of the show while continuing to act in

those shows. Knowing this, it makes sense that in 1919, AEA maintained the view that stage managers were actors with additional responsibilities, ignoring the shifts in duties and responsibilities that were slowly transforming the field of stage management. This leads to a number of questions and speculations, including whether or not stage managers were covered by the AEA contract even when not acting in the show. The answer is debatable. I have no doubt that AEA believed any person who signed on an Equity contract was deserving of the union's protection. However, that does not mean that producers at the time would have agreed with AEA's view.

A few months after the infamous 1919 strike, the producer Romberg, certainly disagreed when he laid off his assistant stage manager, Van Ness, without two-weeks' notice, directly conflicting with the recently-agreed upon terms of the standard 1919 AEA contract. At this time the ASM was most likely the person calling the show and was less likely to act because they were in charge of the backstage area. In response, the AEA Executive Council carried a motion that endorsed the explicit inclusion of stage managers in the collective bargaining process. This motion and information stems from the Executive Council Meeting Minutes dated February 20, 1920.

Re – Ass't. stage manager, Van Ness, Equity Member vs. Romberg – Mr. Mills moved, seconded by Mr. Westley, that the council rules that if a man is engaged as stage manager, or assistant stage manager, he becomes a regular member of the company and in the absence of any agreement to the contrary he must be given his two weeks' notice of dismissal.

CARRIED.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ *AEA Council Meeting Minutes*, (New York: 1920). Microform, Reel 4.

The notion that stage managers and assistant stage managers were included in Equity's membership is evidenced by this record, as the Assistant Stage Manager Van Ness was an Equity member. This motion was caused as direct result of an arbitration or court case between Van Ness and Romberg. While evidence from this arbitration or court case has not been found in AEA's archives, the direct result from this comparatively short paragraph is demonstrated by contractual language changes found in the constitution, contracts and rulebooks. I assume that a major reason these seemingly drastic changes occurred in the official language was because AEA had lost the arbitration case and wanted to protect other AEA stage management members from the same fate. The inclusion of stage managers into the contractual language was an important step for stage management professionalization, as it forced AEA to recognize stage managers as separate entities from non-stage management actors.

One of the earliest modifications was in the 1924 Basic Agreement Between the Managers' Protective Association and Actors' Equity Association, where the stage manager was added to the contractual definition. This can be seen here, where the bold text is used for emphasis to draw attention to sections specifically relating to the stage manager:

Subject to the exemptions herein contained, **wherever the term "actor" is used herein shall apply to any and all males and/or females portraying** any parts or characters, and/or any persons performing in any theatrical troupe or company of performers, and also understudies and **permanent company stage managers...**

Members of the chorus are not hereafter, in any computation, to be considered or counted as a member of any cast, **said computation to be based upon the number of principals, understudies and permanent**

company stage managers as aforesaid only. Extras are not to be counted.⁴⁸

This passage expressly included stage management in the stipulated number of AEA contracts per production. Unlike members of the Chorus Equity Association (a sister union to AEA), which had their own contracts and regulations, stage management contracts would be counted towards the minimum number of Equity hires.⁴⁹ In this respect, AEA assisted the stage management professionalization process, by acknowledging and emphasizing the role of the stage manager in productions and the union. However, this passage also reinforced the idea that stage managers are merely actors with extra responsibilities. Instead of using the term “member,” “artist,” or “actor/stage manager,” the contractual language indicates that the term “Actor” would represent the AEA member. It is from this passage, and all subsequent contracts, that today’s stage managers have commandeered the phrase and reframed it as an ongoing joke, cheekily noting that stage managers are considered “Capital A-Actors” in their contracts.⁵⁰ This contemporary quip is so prominent that the “Year of the Stage Manager” created t-shirts with “Capital A-Stage Manager” as part of their fundraising campaign.⁵¹ In some respects, adding the stage manager to the overall contractual language was a monumental step towards professionalization, even if the title stage manager was mostly represented by “Actor” in the contract itself. Unfortunately, this moment was followed by decades of AEA diminishing the

⁴⁸ *Agreement Between Managers’ Protective Association – Actors’ Equity Association*. (New York, 1924). Bold text for emphasis.

⁴⁹ At this time there was a 80-20 rule, where 80% of the cast needed to be members of AEA. Chorus Equity had a similar rule, however, at this point the calculations were separate to ensure even 80-20 membership across both parts of the cast (Principal and Chorus).

⁵⁰ There is currently a movement in the AEA stage management community to remedy this ambiguity in contracts and union policies by adding actor/stage manager to all applicable documents.

⁵¹ “Capital A Stage Manager T-Shirt,” Year of the Stage Manager 2020/2021 Grassroots Fundraiser Campaign, Bonfire, accessed 25 July 2020, <https://www.bonfire.com/capital-a-stage-manager/?productType=bacf6cd6-b53d-469c-ab96-02afe5b15f71>.

role of the stage manager in theatrical productions and relegating stage managers to a secondary position within the union as actors with adjacent responsibilities.

Having been explicitly added to the professional organization, the next step for professionalization should have been establishing a definition for stage managers. The earliest AEA definition of the stage manager was found in the original 1913 Actors' Equity booklet that included the constitution, by-laws and rules during performance. Rule seven stated, "The stage manager has full control behind the curtain. Any and all exceptions of his rulings must be referred to the manager."⁵² This definition was vague at best, as it fails to provide any insight on the stage manager's duties and responsibilities, although it did imply a sense of power and oversight to the backstage area. Similarly, in the earliest "Regulations" portion of the agreement/contract, another rule mentioned the role of the stage manager: "REGULATIONS: G. Notices – All communications which refer to the company in general shall be posted upon the call board. Notice to the manager must be given to him personally or to his company or stage manager."⁵³ This rule was also quite vague and fails to indicate any specific duties or responsibilities. It reinforced stage management's authority, as it designated that notice was given to the actor directly or to the stage manager with the implication that the stage manager passed the note on. Neither option was particularly detailed. AEA's hesitancy in defining stage management set a precedent that continues today. Instead of offering a definition, the union focuses on the tasks contemporary stage managers are prohibited from doing or tasks that the stage manager should be paid additional compensation. Because a clear and concise definition is

⁵² *The Actors' Equity Association: A Voluntary Association Organized in New York City, May 26, 1913.* (New York: Actors' Equity Association, 1914), 33.

⁵³ *Agreement Between Managers' Protective Association – Actors' Equity Association.* (New York, 1924).

the cornerstone of achieving professionalization, AEA's reluctance to define stage management forestalled the professionalization process.

In addition, and perhaps more frustratingly, AEA built in the authority to delineate the meaning of standard terms in their agreements, yet failed to address stage management's definition. The 1928 Constitution and by-laws state under Article II, Section 6 that, "The council shall have power, from time to time, to define the meaning of the words 'actors,' 'speaking parts,' 'a part which is individual in its character,' 'business of other associations antagonistic,' as used in the preceding sections and shall be the sole judge of the qualifications of any applicant for membership."⁵⁴ The original purpose of this clause was to allow AEA to determine whether or not a specific part should be assigned a chorus or principal contract. However, it also insinuated AEA's ability to allow stage managers the space and place to define and redefine their role in U.S. theatre. Instead, AEA's limited definition of stage management was unable to satisfy the dialogue needed to wholly achieve Wilensky's crucial phase wherein the field designates and delineates the characteristics of the work.

In the May 1929 volume of *Equity* magazine, the editors listed out the do's and don'ts for Equity members, which included explicit instructions: "Stage managers, because of their close relationship to the management, are not considered eligible to serve as deputy."⁵⁵ The list regularly appeared in *Equity* magazine throughout the 1930s and 1940s to educate new members and remind older members of agreed upon interpretations of AEA rules of employment. Instead of expanding its definition on what the stage manager should have been doing in U.S. theatre, the union continued the precedent of highlighting tasks that the stage manager was *not* allowed to

⁵⁴ Constitution and By-laws, 1928, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 1; folder 3; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, pg. 5.

⁵⁵ "Dos and Don'ts for Equity Members," *Equity Magazine*, May 1929, pg. 25.

do. The stage management field was still transitioning from its technical role in the production process to production oversight, which may have been the impetus for focusing on tasks that stage managers should not perform, rather than debating the future of the field. Fearing that stage management would align itself with the producers, AEA focused on tasks that would curb stage management's associations with the producers. This included prohibiting the stage manager to act as deputy and in 1947, mandating that the deputy take over tracking actor hours.⁵⁶ AEA restricted stage management's access to this authority, inevitably influencing the development of stage management in the United States. Because AEA refrained from the larger conversation about stage management's definition, the field was left debating the definition through publishing handbooks.

In 1938, AEA stage managers petitioned AEA for several stage management grievances, beginning a grassroots movement to improve the status and working conditions of the stage manager. By this time, stage management had fully relinquished their directing responsibilities to the director and much of their technical tasks to the technical director. Instead, the stage manager oversaw the production process including the prompter/ASM and backstage crews. Stage managers were acting less and less in the shows they stage managed and in the 1940s began taking on calling the show and marking the promptbook. The 1938 petition by AEA stage managers asked AEA to negotiate for better wages and guaranteed pay for the rehearsal period. The outcome of these requests was reflected in a new stage management rule on the standard contract:

The compensation agreed upon between any stage manager and his employer shall be paid to him in full from the time rehearsals are first called, and no stage

⁵⁶ Notice to All Stage Managers. Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

manager, whether he be a junior or a senior resident⁵⁷ member, shall be employed for a lesser compensation than \$40.00 weekly. In every company in which an Equity member is employed, all stage managers and assistant stage managers shall be and continue to be members of Equity in good standing.⁵⁸

At this time, minimum salaries were determined by the company's highest box office ticket price, with \$40 per week being the lowest salary as it was associated with box office ticket prices \$3 or less.⁵⁹ This rule added the stipulation that stage management would be paid the full amount beginning with the first rehearsal because producers were notorious for contracting stage managers for a rehearsal salary and increasing it once the show opened.⁶⁰ This rule would mandate that stage managers were paid the full salary from the first rehearsal. At the time of this writing, the records for this petition are inaccessible because of the COVID pandemic and renovations to the archive.⁶¹ Without these records, it is difficult to evaluate and compare the stage managers' original requests with the outcome. In addition, meeting minutes or other records would indicate the reasonings given by the executive council and negotiating team for the inclusion or dismissal of those original requests. The exposition from those meetings would provide the motivation for AEA to make these changes. Despite these missing records, this event

⁵⁷ The rules determining Senior/Junior residency were slightly adjusted with each revision of the Constitution. According to the 1928 version, a "Senior Resident" member meant US resident/citizenship, 2+ years of theatrical experience, having worked in the US in the last 5 years and had at least 100 weeks combined of acting experience. Constitution and By Laws, 1928, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 1; folder 3; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, pg. 4-5.

⁵⁸ "Changes in Equity Contracts and Rules," *Equity Magazine*, February 1938, pg. 9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* pg. 10, The highest salary was \$50 for companies with ticket prices at \$4.50 per ticket or higher.

⁶⁰ In March 1939 the above rule was revisited to specifically add the Assistant Stage Manager in its rehearsal pay demand, as a producer hired an ASM for rehearsals, but did not pay the individual for their rehearsal weeks, defying the above ruling. This change was discussed in "Stage Managers Means Assistants Also," *Equity Magazine*, March 1939, pg. 6.

⁶¹ For more information, look at "Executive Committee: Calls to Meetings & Notes 1938 – 1939" and "Matters to be taken up at the Executive Committee Meeting - October 7 1938," at the Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives.

marks the beginning of what would eventually become a grassroots campaign to professionalize stage management through the union.

By 1941, stage management had outgrown its acting roots and 45 members felt compelled to jointly write to AEA Executive Council regarding the field's professionalization and contractual needs. The letter's signees included William C. F. Postance, longtime secretary to William Gillette and Broadway stage manager; Eddie McHugh, Broadway stage manager between 1930 and 1955; and Frank Coletti who stage managed hits like *Of Mice and Men* (1937), *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1949), and *Show Girl* (1961.) William McFadden stage managed *You Can't Take it With You* (1936-1938) and *The Man Who Came to Dinner* (1939-1941). Bert Gruver, author of *The Stage Manager's Handbook* published in 1952 (see chapter one), also signed the letter, although his name is mistakenly typed "Bert Groover."⁶²

The stage management collective called on AEA to admit "that real stage management is a department by itself," arguing that, "we think we are also entitled to some consideration and recognition. We bear the brunt of all productions, are at the beck and call of the management, in fact, everybody from the first rehearsal on."⁶³ Their lengthy missive centered around their main request: a separate contract for stage managers. The group requested a stage management specific minimum salary (\$125 dramatic, \$150 for a musical or tour) arguing that, "the real managers would recognize that ringing a curtain up and down and keeping the morale of the

⁶² The Billboard "The Final Curtain", April 25, 1953 pg 76 Postance – William C. F. https://books.google.com/books?id=bA0EAAAAMBAl&pg=PA76&lpg=PA76&dq=William+C.+F.+Postance+stage+manager&source=bl&ots=7Wua21Mimk&sig=ACfU3U3iS1kmdnbM8PXstBc-Y5ow_SW39w&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKewjBmci1Id3vAhWbG80KHV1oDfMQ6AEwDnoECBAQAw#v=onepage&q=William%20C.%20F.%20Postance%20stage%20manager&f=false; "Edward McHugh," Internet Broadway Database, accessed February, 20, 2021, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/edward-mchugh-106968>; The Internet Broadway Database does not have any records of a "Bert Groover," but Bert Gruver was an active stage manager at the time this letter was written.

⁶³ Correspondence from Stage Managers to the President and Council of the Equity Association, 2 December 1941, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 6; folder 32; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, pg. 1.

company 100%, being prepared, always, with understudies and assured of a smooth performance, is beyond the sphere of the cheap and non-experienced.”⁶⁴ The letter argued that, “every star and company of any repute want and demand that the stage be run right, with no fights, petty grievances either amongst the company or the stage crew. This can only be accomplished by having a diplomatic and experienced stage manager at the helm.”⁶⁵ The letter also demanded that “stage managers must not play parts or understudy” because “a stage manager should not be expected to take an actor’s job any more than an actor should double as a stage manager.”⁶⁶ The stage managers entreated that the new contract should regulate the eligibility of stage management contracts, requesting that the current list of AEA stage managers be frozen.⁶⁷ New stage managers could be added once they had “been a member of ‘Equity’ for Five (5) years and had served as Ass’t Stage Manager with six (6) Broadway Productions or ‘Road’ companies of the same.”⁶⁸ In doing so, “‘Equity’ could vouch for us, by looking up records on every stage manager...and at the same time enable us to better our standing and position in the profession.”⁶⁹ In writing this letter, these 45 stage managers set up the initial bid for professionalization. These same points of contention and requests for acknowledgement have continued over the last 80 years and are still contemporary challenges facing stage management today, demonstrating the ways in which stage management has failed to professionalize.

These forty-five stage managers likely represented about 150 Broadway stage managers. The stage management community has always been small. In 1947, John Kennedy, a former

⁶⁴ Correspondence from Stage Managers to the President, 1941, 3.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 2

⁶⁶ Ibid, 2.

⁶⁷ While the letter indicated that such a list existed, it also indicated that the list should “be made up of stage managers who have worked for a recognized management.” AEA membership files have restricted access until 2028 to confirm if such a list existed.

⁶⁸ Correspondence from Stage Managers to the President, 1941, 2.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 3.

Broadway stage manager who had moved to St. Louis to direct, stage manage and take on the role of production manager at the Muny, estimated that the field had roughly 180 Broadway members.⁷⁰ In a 1969 survey of AEA members, 340 members reported stage management as their primary category, approximately 9 percent of respondents, and another 230 members reported stage management as a secondary employment category. In other words, thirteen percent of all respondents chose stage management as either a primary or secondary employment category.

Despite the community's small size, many AEA members supported the stage managers' endeavors. Several letters to AEA leadership strongly endorsed the proposed stage managers' contract, including a letter from Raymond Massey, a television/film actor and AEA council member, stating that, "such a contract has long been needed."⁷¹ Margaret Webster, director, actor, and co-founder of the American Repertory Theatre, also wrote a letter of support.⁷²

Once the initial stage management missive and proposed contract was received, AEA appointed a special committee to deliberate over the stage managers' memo and offer feedback to AEA's Executive Council. The special committee included Margaret Webster, Ben Smith, and Matt Briggs, a Broadway actor and Western film actor. The special committee met with stage management delegates including Jerome (Jerry) Whyte, who notably stage managed *The Boys From Syracuse*, *Oklahoma!* and *The King and I*, Edward Mendelsohn, and Ward Bishop, stage manager for *Brigadoon* and *Kiss Me, Kate*.⁷³ Once the two groups met, the special committee

⁷⁰ Dennis Brown, *The Muny Saga*, 2018, accessed October 25, 2019, <http://online.anyflip.com/tpvx/jifz/mobile/index.html#p=1>.

⁷¹ Correspondence from Raymond Mussey to Mr. Paul Dullzell, 22 February, 1942. Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 6; folder 32; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

⁷² Correspondence from Margaret Webster to Mr. Paul Dullzell, 9 February 1942. Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 6; folder 32; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

⁷³ "Jerome Whyte," Internet Broadway Database, accessed February, 20, 2021, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/jerome-whyte-22526>; "Ward Bishop," Internet Broadway Database, accessed February, 20, 2021, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/ward-bishop-32143>

wrote recommendations that were presented to the Executive Council. The Executive Council included the officers for AEA (president, vice president, etc.) and regional representatives. At times, these officers, which I refer to as AEA Leadership, overturned decisions made by Executive Council. For the purposes of this chapter, Bert Lytell (AEA President), Walter N. Greaza (assistant executive secretary) and Paul Dullzell (Executive Secretary) were members of AEA leadership with the legal team, Paul N. Turner and Rebecca Brownstein. Turner worked with AEA from its founding, helping the organization to craft the constitution and by-laws.⁷⁴ At his wife's request, Turner hired Brownstein shortly after she graduated in 1928 from St. John's University School of Law, in the school's first female class of law students, before she had even taken the bar exam.⁷⁵ Turner served as legal counsel for 37 years until his death in 1950, at which point, Brownstein took over as chief counsel and served for three years before leaving over salary negotiations.⁷⁶

In the meeting minutes from the delegation, the special committee noted that the agreement with the League of New York Theatres was not set to expire until August 1943, so any negotiation with the producers would require voluntary consent from both organizations.⁷⁷ The committee recommended that "Equity ask the League whether it would be willing to appoint a sub-committee to discuss with Equity delegates the possibility of formulating a separate

⁷⁴ Paul N. Turner, 1869-1950: Founder of the PAUL N. TURNER BEQUEST in *The New York Community Trust*, The New York Community Trust, July 2008, <https://licf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/PaulNTurner.pdf>.

⁷⁵ *Raising the Bar: America Celebrates 150 Years of Women Lawyers, 1869-2019*, National Conference of Women's Bar Associations, August 1, 2019, https://issuu.com/faircountmedia/docs/ncwba_women_lawyers_150, 13; Turner, 9.

⁷⁶ "Legitimate: Sides and Asides." *The Billboard (Archive: 1894-1960)*, May 13, 1950, 50, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/magazines/legitimate-sides-asides/docview/1039964065/se-2?accountid=14553>; "Legitimate: Hassle Looms on Brownstein Equity Exit, Though New Counsel is Sought." *Variety (Archive: 1905-2000)*, Oct 21, 1953, 69-69, 72, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/magazines/legitimate-hassle-looms-on-brownstein-equity-exit/docview/963277463/se-2?accountid=14553>.

⁷⁷ Correspondence from Committee to Consider Stage Managers' Memo (Margaret Webster, Matt Briggs, Ben Smith) to Council, 10 February, 1942. Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 6; folder 32; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, pg. 1.

contract for stage managers, in the belief that such action would be beneficial to the producers themselves as well as to the membership of Equity, and would be for the health of the theatre in general.”⁷⁸ The special committee noted that, “The conditions of employment for stage managers and the nature of the specialized technical and organizational work required of them place them in a category of theatre work different from and having little in common with the actor, whose problems Equity’s present contracts are designed to cover... Your committee deplores the growing tendency to put an actor, not necessarily trained in stage management, into the prompt corner in order to save a salary.”⁷⁹ In addition, the committee incorporated seven provisions for the stage management contract including the prohibition to act in the play, a minimum salary based on recently filed stage management contracts, the continuation of full pay for rehearsals but with the expectation that stage managers will complete one week of preproduction work for dramatic shows and two weeks for musicals without compensation, and specifications for “preliminary training and experience, which should be fulfilled by an individual qualifying to receive a stage manager’s contract.”⁸⁰ Had AEA followed the recommendations of this promising letter, then perhaps stage management would have achieved its professionalization status through the development of its own contract.

The special committee’s report boosted the hopes of members that AEA leadership would recognize stage management as a distinct field. Instead, a letter from AEA leadership, including the legal team, was sent to the Executive Council on March 2, 1942 undermining much of what the special committee stated. The authors wrote:

⁷⁸ Correspondence from Committee to Council, pg. 1

⁷⁹ Ibid, pg. 1-2.

⁸⁰ Ibid, pg. 2-3.

We are of the opinion that these conclusions are basically and fundamentally founded on a wrong foundation and are dangerous to the welfare of the American theatre as well as of this Association. If we concede the committee's conclusions, it must follow that Equity has no jurisdiction over stage managers and that perhaps quite unintentionally this committee's report would in the future be the basis for a separate stage managers' organization. The consequences that would follow from such an event, we believe, are too elementary for us to argue.⁸¹

It was here in this letter, in this passage and in this moment, that AEA failed stage management as it disabused the field of its aims to distinguish itself and professionalize. Their arguments were based on the fear that stage managers would separate from their union. AEA leadership goes on to argue:

Historically and factually we know it cannot be said that a stage manager has little in common with the actor. From a practical standpoint, it is essential that competent stage managers should be actors and still in the business of acting, and that the work of the stage managers is throughout intertwined with the work of actors and they should be considered a part of the acting profession and as much a part of any production as the actors in it...In other words, we do not believe that stage managing is a separate craft or art that has little to do with acting. Equity in its early days had to fight to have only Equity members as stage managers and rightly so because they belong in Equity since their interest lies with the actors and the actors' interest would be jeopardized if the stage managers were not with them.⁸²

⁸¹ Correspondence from Bert Lytell, et.al. to Council, 2 March 1942, pg. 1.

⁸² Correspondence from Bert Lytell, et.al. to Council, 2 March 1942, pg. 1.

This action, based on fear, caused continued harm throughout the years as AEA's leadership continued to cling to the notion that stage managers were only actors with additional tasks and therefore did not deserve any special treatment or classification. By the late 1940s, AEA was divided into two schools of thought: the established view that stage managers were actors first and foremost and should not receive any special treatment, and the emerging group of stage managers and likeminded individuals who insisted that stage management was its own burgeoning field. AEA leadership viewed stage managers as actors because of the field's long history as leading actors.

Wilensky refers to this ideological clash as "The contest between the home guard who learned the hard way... and the newcomers... The newcomers see the oldtimers as a block to successful professionalization; the latter see the former as upstarts."⁸³ AEA leadership, many of them founders, staunchly perpetuated their antiquated definitions of stage management, ignoring the transformations actively occurring in the field at that time. The union failed to adjust its classifications for stage managers as the field transitioned from directing to technical oversight to production stage management. Instead, AEA leadership reinforced the notion that that stage managers were actors. AEA leadership was afraid that stage managers would realign themselves with producers. Keeping the stage managers classified as actors and in the actors' union protected the actors because stage managers were often tasked with overseeing the agreed upon rules of employment. If stage managers were granted the specialty status they requested and left the union, AEA's built-in safeguard for the actors would be gone. AEA needed to keep stage managers satisfied enough that the stage managers did not turn to the producers or other organizations for support, but not so much assistance that stage managers would abandon the

⁸³ Wilensky, *Everyone?*, 144.

union. Had the stage managers left AEA to join ranks with the producers, AEA would have had less influence over the field and the producing managers would have had more control over day-to-day operations. In addition, AEA's bargaining position would have weakened because stage managers often ensured that AEA rules were followed. Without the stage manager overseeing the rules, AEA could bargain for negotiations and producers could undermine those negotiations by not adhering to their side of the agreement. Instead of embracing the things that set stage managers apart from actors, the union desperately fought against those differences, which, ironically, led stage managers to form their own professional organization in 1947.

AEA's leadership response mandates that "Equity has never set itself up as a judge of the experience and the ability of its members."⁸⁴ However, that argument directly contradicts the AEA Constitution from 1928, which stated under Article II, section 1-4 that membership would be divided into "Junior" and "Senior" status based on the number of years onstage, and Article II, section 6 had stated that AEA "shall be the sole judge of the qualifications of any applicant for membership."⁸⁵ I would argue that AEA's leadership sought a means to disregard the distinction between acting experience and stage management experience in order to argue that all members should be treated the same. AEA leadership feared:

Such discrimination would be most dangerous, unfair, and would create hard feelings among our members...If stage managers can consider themselves a group apart in this organization, a series of other groups could feel that they are entitled to special consideration and use the same arguments in favor of such consideration that the stage managers are now using. For instance, character actors or stars might claim that they are a special class and that Equity set up a

⁸⁴ Correspondence from Bert Lytell, et.al. to Council, 2 March 1942, 2.

⁸⁵ Constitution and By-laws, 1928, pg. 5.

special minimum for them or create a special working conditions. We feel that Equity's contract and Equity's minimum are all embracing. Stage managers should be protected in the same manner and to the same extent as other actors and should be paid for their work according to their ability and individual bargaining power. If we establish better working conditions for the stage managers than for the actors, we deliberately take the stage managers into the managers camp, and will create a very important schism in our own ranks.⁸⁶

While retaining fairness among members is certainly to be admired, AEA leadership disregarded the primary issue: that stage management had reinvented itself in the early twentieth century and no longer fit within the parameters of AEA's jurisdiction. However, stage managers had already been formally admitted into the union through the contractual language, making it increasingly difficult to abruptly leave the association in favor of another organization and a better stage-management contract. If fairness was truly the deciding factor, AEA should have listened to the stage management community's grievances and realized that monumental shifts had occurred in the last few decades and perhaps they would have made more equitable choices. That being said, Turner and Brownstein got exactly what they wanted, which was the suppression of a minority faction and several more years of peace before the legal department was forced to acknowledge that stage management had outgrown its acting pedigree.

In an article in *Equity* magazine, Bill Ross, a leading stage manager at the time, expressed his frustration that, "for many years the stage managers have felt that their particular craft suffered from both a lack of representation in their union and a lack of recognition in the theatre."⁸⁷ Part of that lack of representation and recognition included small injustices that

⁸⁶ Correspondence from Bert Lytell, et.al. to Council, 2 March 1942, pg. 2.

⁸⁷ Bill Ross, "Report on the Stage Managers" *Equity* Magazine, April 1948, pg. 13.

overlooked the role of the stage manager in U.S. theatre. One of those misconceptions propagated by Bert Lytell, AEA's President, was the idea that "employment begins when the actor is first called for rehearsal and in our opinion we should not establish a point of employment which would commence prior to the first call of rehearsal."⁸⁸ In fact, it has been long established that the stage manager's first day of labor begins far before the first call of rehearsal. In addition to overlooking how the definition of the first day of employment affects stage management, AEA continues to unintentionally promulgate the first day of rehearsal as the first day of employment. On most AEA contracts today the theatrical company and/or AEA member is required to fill in the "first rehearsal day," which is synonymous for the "first day of work;" however, this distinction is not always made known. When I initially joined the union, I often wrote the date of the first rehearsal, not recognizing that AEA actually wanted my first date of employment, which on some contracts was a few days to a week prior to the start of rehearsals. As such, my contract was sent back to the theatrical company with the note that the date on my contract needed to reflect my first day of work, and therefore, delayed the processing and disbursement of my initial paycheck. Through this example, it is evident that AEA has a long history of ignoring the unique obligations of the stage manager and the importance of stage management's professionalization. As a result, these small injustices fueled the 2020-2021: Year of the Stage Manager campaign, which aimed to educate the theatrical field on stage management concerns.

⁸⁸ Correspondence from Bert Lytell, et.al. to Council, 2 March 1942, pg. 3.

CONCLUSION

At the time of AEA's founding, many stage managers were actors, so their participation in AEA's initial professional organization was understood and encouraged, but vastly different from stage managements' treatment thirty years later. AEA's 1913 Constitution included an alternative way to join under Article II: Section 3, which suggested sympathetic parties could join AEA as laymen and, therefore, offered an alternative way for stage managers and other theatrical professionals to join.⁸⁹ In the early years AEA needed numbers to bolster its authority, so in addition to rallying performers, the organization broadened their membership to include sympathizers and other theatrical fields including directors, playwrights and other non-performing theatrical titles. This is evidenced in archival records, which included contracts written by Actors' Equity Association for AEA members who were directors and playwrights.⁹⁰ While AEA aided directors and playwrights as best they could in those early years, playwrights eventually formed the Dramatists Guild of America in 1919 and the Society of Directors and Choreographers was founded in 1959, aiding in the professionalization of those fields. While stage managers earned explicit identification in AEA contracts (because of *Van Ness v. Romberg*), it also prevented stage managers from eventually forming their own union, like the playwrights and directors, and earning their own professionalization status. Had AEA been as welcoming in the later years and less resistant to stage management's shifting functions, perhaps the stage management community could have concurrently professionalized.

⁸⁹ *Actors' Equity Association*, (1914), 17-18.

⁹⁰ Director and playwright contracts are discussed in "A Contract for Directors", *Equity Magazine*, January 1929, pg. 9 and in Alfred L. Bernheim, *The Business Of The Theatre* (New York: Actors' Equity Association, 1932), 111.; Physical copies of Director and playwright contracts can be found in Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 6; folder 39; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

Even today, stage managers head to online discussion boards to pose the question, “do you agree with Equity representing stage managers?”⁹¹ Participants argue that by being members of the Actors’ Union, stage managers today are often put in a difficult position when they are held responsible for ensuring that contractual agreements are followed. In addition, the contractual needs of the stage manager continue to be vastly different from the contractual needs of the actor, leading many contemporary stage managers to argue for a separate stage management contract or for the field to withdraw from Actors’ Equity in favor of finding or building a more advantageous union.

Both Wilensky and Alexander maintain that many occupations aspiring to a professional status will not achieve it in the traditional sense of the word. That is, in terms of the prestige, power, and financial success of the established professions such as medicine or law. AEA’s #AskIfItsAEA campaign is marketed to reflect a sense of professionalization that has no basis on a higher pedigree than non-union actors, as AEA maintains no restrictions or indications signaling that AEA actors are better, more educated or longer trained than non-union actors. In reality, the campaign should be marketed to highlight how AEA productions offer better protections, insurance and pension to its members, making AEA productions theoretically more socially conscious.

Due to the Taft-Hartley Act, the union was prohibited from taking over the entire field and mandating that all professional theatres needed to participate in their closed shop. In spite of this, AEA has preserved its stronghold on Broadway, which is often considered the epi-center of theatre in the United States, and on many major regional theatre houses. In doing so, the union

⁹¹ This dissention is discussed on a few discussion boards, such as: “Do You Agree with Equity Representing Stage Managers?”, SMNetwork.org, 26 January 2008, accessed September 2011, <http://smnetwork.org/forum/the-hardline/do-you-agree-with-equity-representing-stage-managers/>

clearly defined its jurisdiction on notable U.S. theatre, marginally eliminating incompetent practitioners and through that process ascertained a formidable level of professionalization.

By contrast, AEA continually prevented stage management's professionalization in its earliest efforts. Stage managers were unable to define and redefine the field without AEA's assistance and approval, and since AEA leadership maintained its outdated view of stage management, the field was unable to eliminate incompetent and/or inexperienced stage managers from the field. As such, stage management failed to achieve professionalization. Eventually, stage managers attempted to form their own professional organization, with the aim of professionalizing the field and bettering stage management working conditions. While it was met with its own set of challenges described in chapter three, its creation marked the moment when the stage management community understood that while AEA fully supported its acting members, it was less interested in catering to the needs of stage management's marginal population. As of the mid-1940s, the field had been unable to attain Wilensky's third step to professionalization through the support of a professional organization.

CHAPTER 3:

STAGE MANAGERS' ASSOCIATION: A FLAWED TURNING POINT

Sid Solomon, an Eastern Principal delegate for the April 2021 inaugural convention for Actors' Equity Association, championed a resolution to prohibit AEA from granting any concessions that would result in fewer stage management jobs.¹ On his campaign website, he charges Equity with a culture of compliance that harms stage managers and limits their protections. He writes [bold and italics are his]:

What's a contract concession? It's basically when an employer comes to Equity **after** contract negotiations have ended, asking for something new. Usually in exchange for nothing. *'We know we had a deal and shook hands and signed on the dotted line, but we'd like something else too, please.'* **And believe it or not, we have a culture at Equity of saying yes. A lot. Unfortunately, it is our stage manager members who are often hurt by these concessions, with their jobs—guaranteed jobs that we've achieved in negotiation—routinely being given away. This has to change.** I serve on five different Equity contract committees, and have never once seen an instance in which it was appropriate or fair to allow the concession of a stage manager's job.²

As Solomon indicates in his resistance to contract concessions, theatrical producers can finesse the required stage management contracts to fit their needs. Most harmfully to stage managers, they often hire unqualified staff to double as stage managers and prioritize understudy skills

¹ David Robb, "Actors Equity Members Vote to Create National Convention," *Deadline*, published May 31, 2019, <https://deadline.com/2019/05/actors-equity-members-create-national-convention-1202625274/>.

² "Convention Goals: Prohibit Concession of Stage Manager Jobs," #SidForAEA, accessed: January 30, 2021, <http://www.sidforaea.com/prohibit-concession-of-stage-manager-jobs.html>.

above stage management abilities. Asking AEA for a concession on required stage management contracts is another one of those loopholes. Unfortunately, AEA frequently grants such concessions leaving productions across the country without experienced AEA stage managers and/or assistant stage managers. This practice perpetuates the exploitation of stage managers as it maintains the impression that stage managers are expendable, replaceable and unnecessary. Solomon's battle against such harmful practices to the profession revives historical efforts to stabilize and recognize the value of stage management within AEA.

AEA's historic apathy towards its stage management members can be identified and has been preserved in the policies it historically refused to ratify or implement. This includes the contemporary practice of accepting concessions that waive required stage management contracts. This chapter explores the 1947 memo of stage management grievances to illustrate stage management's continued fight for representation and acknowledgement within the union. Using memos, letters, meeting minutes and reports from AEA's archive, I demonstrate how AEA's legal team, despite support from the special committee and prominent union members, vetoed several significant requests and ultimately doomed the professionalization of stage management. This chapter explores the growing frustration within the stage management community in the 1940s, its efforts to stabilize the profession, and AEA's resistance to stage management demands. In this chapter, I examine AEA's hesitation to accede to stage management demands in the context of the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, which was signed into law just weeks after AEA's ruling. In fear of government retaliation in an especially fraught moment in domestic Cold War dynamics and amidst emerging definitions of labor, AEA prohibited stage management's second and third attempts at professionalization. To placate the stage management community, AEA acquiesced on only two of the eight 1947 contractual demands. Frustrated with AEA, the stage

management community created the Stage Managers' Association to arbitrate its professionalization. AEA, caught between the political realities of the late 1940s and the stage management community, was forced to recognize the field as separate from acting in exchange for the dissolution of their organization. The union's recognition of the field served as a flawed turning point for the stage management community. While stage managers had finally convinced AEA of their differences, stage managers lost the ability to mediate their professionalization through their own distinctive organization.

1947 STAGE MANAGEMENT GRIEVANCES

The stage management community failed to persuade AEA leadership of the urgency for their professionalization with the 1942 memo (see chapter two). In the 1942 memo, the stage managers asked AEA to recognize that stage management was a separate field from acting, deserved its own stage management contract, and offered seven negotiating points. The field asked to: ban stage managers from concurrently acting, establish a minimum stage management salary, end the loop-hole that allowed producers to pay a lower salary for rehearsals, limit uncompensated preproduction work to one week for dramatic shows and two weeks for a musical, standardize compensation for any directing duties on tours or revivals, and create a qualifications clause. The 1942 Executive Council contended that one of the original seven suggestions was already executed in the standard AEA contract. The remaining six were considered contrary to the larger goals of the union because those action items treated stage managers differently than the actors. The Executive Council, persuaded by AEA leadership, felt that stage managers were actors with additional responsibilities, which did not entitle them to special treatment.

The stage managers, undaunted, began reaching out to their colleagues to commiserate and generate support in favor of stage management professionalization. At first, these meetings were primarily one-on-one and gradually grew to larger gatherings, building on the grassroots campaign that had begun in 1938 and continued with the 1942 stage management grievances. Over the next five years stage managers gathered, complained and pooled knowledge. In October 1946, Bill Ross, the unofficial leader of the group, and several of his colleagues wrote letters to everyone who had listed themselves as a stage manager in the *Equity Players' Guide*, a pictorial dictionary of legitimate theatre players.³ Ross' letter invited stage managers to attend a series of stage management meetings to discuss the challenges facing the field. Those meetings would ultimately result in the 1947 Letter of Stage Management Grievances, which offered another set of actionable items to resolve many of the issues facing the stage management community. Many of the 1947 action items were repeated efforts from the 1942 memo, which failed to produce any meaningful outcomes. The stage managers, led by Ross, Eddie Dimond, Jerome (Jerry) Whyte, Edward (Eddie) Mendelsohn, and Frank Hall, hoped that with a greater number of stage management signees, that AEA would be forced to listen, recognize the field, and adopt their suggestions.

AEA's leadership had also changed between the 1942 memo and 1947 letter of grievances, perhaps inspiring the stage management community to try again. Bert Lytell, president of Actors' Equity Association at the time of the 1942 memo, was one of the authors of AEA's 1942 response letter. In 1946, Clarence Derwent took over as president of AEA and Paul Dullzell (Executive Secretary of AEA) handled the correspondence for the 1947 letter of stage

³ "Bill Ross's Report on the Stage Managers," *Equity Magazine*, April 1948, 13. Due to the pandemic, the *Equity Players Guide* is currently unavailable, which would have given a sense of the demographic size of the stage management community.

management grievances. In addition, records show that Rebecca Brownstein, associate legal counsel for AEA, took a leadership role in handling the 1947 stage management grievances. For the purposes of this chapter, AEA leadership will include Clarence Derwent, Paul Dullzell and Rebecca Brownstein.

The 1947 Letter of Stage Management Grievances was sent to AEA Executive Council on January 17, 1947, starting what would be a tumultuous year for the stage management community. Ross, Dimond, Whyte, Mendelsohn, Hall, and the other stage managers articulated their desire to be above-board:

We would have it understood that these meetings were in no way an attempt to transgress the jurisdiction of Equity – that they were an almost spontaneous result of discussion of the Stage Manager’s problems among small groups which evolved into the larger group – and that there was and is no attempt to distinguish the group from Equity itself. We seek no privilege as a special class but rather do we feel that as Stage Managers, there are certain problems which affect us in a more direct manner than they do other members of Equity.⁴

This group of stage managers did not wish to separate themselves from Equity or create their own union, perhaps because they understood that the strength of the protections that AEA offered could not be equaled by forming a separate union. Nevertheless, they wanted to resolve the challenges they faced through Equity’s bureaucratic process.

When comparing the 1942 memo and 1947 letter of grievances, the demands are eerily similar. Both requested AEA ban stage managers and assistant stage managers from acting

⁴ Correspondence from Committee of Stage Managers to Mr. Paul Dullzell, 17 January 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

and/or understudying and set up different stage management minimum salaries for New York/touring productions and legitimate plays/musicals. Both requested qualification standards to ensure quality stage management labor, arguing that without regulation, producers were hiring the cheapest person available rather than based off credentials. Whereas the 1942 memo requested that AEA limit pre-production to one unpaid week for plays and two unpaid weeks for musicals, the 1947 letter of grievances requested that stage managers be paid for all pre-production work. The 1947 letter of grievances added a motion that all ASMs should be paid from their first day of work to ensure that ASMs were also paid for pre-production labor. The stage managers also requested that if an ASM joined later in the rehearsal process, that the ASM be retroactively paid from the first rehearsal to monetarily balance the increased labor necessary to get caught up with the production. The stage managers hoped that this negotiating point would encourage producers to hire the ASM for the first rehearsal since the financial responsibility of an ASM would be the same regardless if they were hired for the first rehearsal or three weeks later. The 1947 letter of grievances also requested a stage management advisory committee made up of three stage managers who would advise the Executive Council on stage management issues. The similarities between the two demonstrate that little had changed for the stage management community between 1942 and 1947.⁵

To sow support for their cause, the stage managers turned to trade magazines for publicity assistance. *The Billboard* published,

“The idea,” one spokesman put it, “is one of mutual self-help. We want to try to elevate the stage manager’s status to that of a technician.” Stage managers have been more or

⁵ Correspondence from Stage Managers to the President and Council of the Equity Association, 2 December 1941, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 6; folder 32; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University, pg. 1; Stage Managers to Dullzell, 17 January 1947.

less of step-children in the theatre. As an actor, they obviously come under Equity jurisdiction, but in technical capacities they are all too frequently regarded as stooges for management – as witnessed by the fact that they are not allowed to act as Equity deputies. It is an anomalous position. What the lads want is to have Equity correct this situation, either by a special contract in their behalf, or by the addition of riders to existing ones.⁶

One area of tension between the stage managers and AEA centered on the restriction for stage managers to be deputies. Despite AEA's claim that stage managers were actors with additional duties, stage managers felt that by denying stage management's technical role in the production process and by preventing stage managers to act as the deputy, AEA was actually categorizing them as in-line with management goals. The stage manager and deputy served as safeguards to ensure that the producers were adhering to the negotiated agreements. AEA did not want to admit to the technical responsibilities of the stage manager because the union was worried stage managers would leave or undermine the union in favor of the producers.

Dullzell confirmed receiving the 1947 letter of stage management grievances on April 9, 1947 in a letter to William Hammerstein, the stage managers' appointed secretary. Dullzell noted that the 1947 letter of stage management grievances would be added to the "first meeting that the council agenda permits."⁷ Hammerstein responded saying that he would be leaving town, so further correspondence should be sent to Bill Ross.⁸ AEA Executive Council decided at the May

⁶ "Legitimate: New Stage Manager Group Seeks Better Conditions," *The Billboard* (Archive: 1894-1960), February 8, 1947, 42, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/magazines/legitimate-new-stage-manager-group-seeks-better/docview/1040030696/se-2?accountid=14553>.

⁷ Correspondence from Paul Duzell to William Hammerstein, 9 April 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 6; folder 32; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

⁸ Correspondence from Willaim Hammerstein to Paul Dullzell, 28 April 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 6; folder 32; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

6, 1947 Executive Council meeting that Paul Dullzell and staff would circulate copies of the 1947 letter of stage management grievances so that all Executive Council members could prepare for a special council meeting devoted to the letter's contents scheduled for May 20, 1947.⁹ The circulated copies were sent out on May 9, giving the councilors ten days to review the contents of the 1947 letter of stage management grievances.

Letters and telegrams from prominent AEA members arrived at AEA headquarters to kindly request that the Executive Council hear the stage managers' demands and honor those requests. John Kennedy, director, producer, and production manager of the Municipal Theatre of St. Louis (colloquially referred to as the Muny), sent a telegram from St. Louis saying, "These men who when they are experienced perform so vital a service to the theatre are the most underpaid unappreciated group in the business they are deserving of every assistance you can give them."¹⁰ Another group noted, "it is our sincere belief that these requests will help not only the stage managers but the actors, managers and audiences respectfully submitted."¹¹ Despite these antecedent letters, the May 20, 1947 meeting seems to have not gone in favor of the stage managers. Four days after the meeting, Kennedy sent a damning three-page letter to AEA Executive Council stressing the significance of the matter, "According to my advices from New York, at their last meeting there were one hundred and eighty-six stage managers and assistants present. As this number comprises nearly every important stage manager in the business, with the exception of those on tour, it should impress the Council with the seriousness and justice of

⁹ Correspondence from Paul Dullzell to Councilor, 6 May 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹⁰ Western Union Telegram from John Kennedy to Council Actors Equity Association, 20 May 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 6; folder 32; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹¹ Western Union Telegram from Frank Hall, Ben Ross Berenberg, Esther Snowden, William MacFadden, Hugh Rennie, Chet Obrien, Murray Queen, Barbara Adams to Council Actors Equity Association, 26 May 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 6; folder 32; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

their requests.”¹² As a former stage manager himself, he was uniquely qualified to argue on behalf of the stage managers and turned this moment into an opportunity to continue espousing for the cause. In Kennedy’s letter, he broke down each of the arguments in favor for each of the stage management demands.

On the matter of barring stage managers and assistants from understudying and acting in the productions they stage manage, Kennedy argued, “This, to me, seems so logical and reasonable a request as to require no comment at all,”¹³ but reasoned that since the Executive Council refused to adhere to such logic that he would explain anyway. He concentrated on four arguments in favor of banning stage managers from understudying and acting. First and foremost, he asked the Executive Council why they would allow a stage manager to put an actor out of a job? He noted, “Council has been puzzling its collective brains to make work for actors and here is their big chance. Why not do the obvious?”¹⁴ Next he addressed the physical challenges of requiring a stage manager to simultaneously perform while also watching the performance to take notes. He argued that this practice limited the quality of the performance as objective notes are unable to be taken or given. His third reason challenged Bert Lytell’s 1942 explanation that banning stage managers from acting or understudying limited their earning potential. Ironically, this explanation is often given today when stage managers ask about the combined ASM/Understudy position and other side duties that stage managers are asked to perform. To which, Kennedy said, “Pay your stage manager a decent wage and he won’t need to take a minimum actor’s job at cut rate. Remember when stage hands in road companies were paid \$10 or so for doing a bit? You’ve stopped that, why not go the whole hog and protect the

¹² Correspondence from John Kennedy to Council, 24 May 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Kennedy to Council, 24 May 1947.

actor from the stage manager and the stage manager from the actor.”¹⁵ His final reasoning recalled the general 1942 response to the stage manager’s memo, which argued that many actors started their careers as stage managers and therefore should not be given special treatment in the union. Kennedy disputed this and maintained that this tradition needs to be interrupted, “There’s a lot more to the job than that. Can you imagine that callow youth taking notes and telling experienced actors why they lost a laugh, to play a certain scene faster, or to stop ad-libbing?”¹⁶ At the next special business meeting, the Executive Council motioned and seconded the accepted clause.¹⁷ This was an important win for stage managers, but the motivation was perhaps less about endorsing stage management sentiment and more tailored towards garnering additional work for actors. Today, AEA stage managers rarely act or understudy in the shows they manage, however, AEA’s position about assistants acting has largely weakened in the last eighty years.

The second item in the 1947 memo requested a minimum salary wage specifically for stage managers and assistant stage managers. This was originally eliminated in 1942 because leadership feared that the minimum wage would become a maximum wage. The Executive Council also feared that if stage managers received special treatment, that other specialty groups would demand similar benefits. In Kennedy’s letter he argued, “[The stage management minimum salary] is high and justifiable for two reasons. First, the job when it is well done is worth that. Secondly, it protects good, experienced men who are willing to devote their careers to stage managing. If a manager knows he has to pay a decent wage for any stage manager, he will make sure that he gets one who knows his business.”¹⁸ He compares the current situation to when

¹⁵ Kennedy to Council, 24 May 1947.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Minutes of Special Council Meeting Held May 26, 1947, 26 May 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹⁸ Kennedy to Council, May 24, 1947.

the Executive Council created a Junior minimum salary and Senior minimum salary based on experience. Soon, theatre producers were hiring only junior members for their productions because it meant saving money.

Unsurprisingly, this second motion lost in the Executive Council meeting since there was no perceived residual benefit for AEA actors. In a letter from Paul Dullzell, executive secretary for AEA to Bill Ross, one of the stage management leaders, Dullzell explained the outcome from the Executive Council meeting on the stage management matter, “The council disapproved of the establishing of a separate minimum wage for stage managers and assistant stage managers, and so voted.”¹⁹ This outcome served as a cautionary reminder that stage management resolutions marketed as beneficial to AEA Actors were historically better received. On the question of minimum wage, there was the potential to establish a precedent that the minimum would become the maximum salary. In addition, AEA feared that separate minimum wages for stage managers and actors would cause disgruntlement within the ranks and sow discord between the actors and stage managers.

Receiving payment for pre-production work was the third request from stage managers. Kennedy argued that the practice of promising stage managers long runs as remuneration for endless pre-production meetings with actors, creating production paperwork and being useful was inequitable. He recalled, “It has been my own experience, as well as that of every stage manager in show business, at one time or another, to give two, three, and even more weeks of my time for nothing and then to have the show postponed and start looking for another job.”²⁰ Stage managers wanted to change these unfair business practices of unpaid labor and the culture that

¹⁹ Correspondence from Paul Dullzell to Bill Ross, 26 May 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

²⁰ Kennedy to Council, May 24, 1947.

allowed these conditions to continue. Kennedy said, “If we are asked why we do this, the answer is that it is the accepted practice and if one man refused to do it another would step in and take his place. Only a contract with protecting clauses can do away with this abuse.”²¹ In the Executive Council meeting two days after Kennedy’s letter, the Executive Council amended the motion to reinforce AEA’s contractual power and the required bond deposited with Equity. The amendment said, “Providing that stage managers and assistant stage managers shall do no work of any nature whatever without a signed contract for which a bond has been deposited with Equity and received instructions from the management as to the work.”²² The executive council strengthened its previously held position that stage managers shouldn’t work without a contract, but failed to address how to negotiate the stage managers’ labor before the first day of rehearsal. This shifted the responsibility to individual producers, requiring their theatres to place deposits and obtain contracts earlier so that they could hire stage managers for preproduction work. In doing so, the burden remained with the stage manager to ensure that a contract was received and a bond submitted before they signed or worked a contract. This also did little to address Kennedy’s fear of expendability, continuing the practice that should a stage manager say, “no, not without a contract,” the producer would easily look elsewhere for one who would. Today, contracts have built in a pre-production week,²³ that monetarily compensates stage managers for their pre-production labor. However, stage managers are still considered expendable and undervalued, which reinforces the necessity of a professionalized status that stage managers seek to achieve.

²¹ Kennedy to Council, 24 May 1947.

²² Minutes of Special Council, May 26, 1947.

²³ Exact amount of time varies depending on title and contract.

The fourth directive sought to pay ASM's their full salary from their earliest work day (i.e. pre-production), and to require ASMs to start no later than the first day of rehearsal. In situations when the ASM was not hired for the first day of rehearsal, the missive asked that ASMs receive full salary retroactively. Interestingly, Kennedy recommended changes to this, not because he did not agree with its benefits, but out of fear that it would be difficult to enforce. He worried, "If you force [the producer] to pay a retroactive salary he very likely will tell the Stage manager to go ahead and run the show without one which may be a little tough on the Stage manager. I suggest the full salary for assistants but leave out the retroactive clause as it may be more trouble than it's worth."²⁴ The Executive Council agreed with Kennedy, approving the motion that "Assistant stage managers shall receive full salary from the time that they are called to work as provided for in the present Equity contract."²⁵ While helpful, the aim of this motion was to create more stage management positions. The Executive Council's protection of the ASM's full salary from first rehearsal merely reinforced what was already negotiated in the contract. Similar to the previous demand, AEA merely reinforced existing policies without acknowledging the heart of the problem and redirected the burden of getting paid for pre-production work back to the ASM.

The qualification clause appeared in both the 1942 and 1947 stage management proposals and arguably has been bandied about in stage management circles ever since. Its longevity in the stage management movement is fascinating because its objective is closely tied to the professionalization of stage management. The fact that this continues to be debated eighty years later is extremely disappointing considering the benefits it would have on the stage management community. Kennedy noted that the proposed qualifications "seem to be a most modest and

²⁴ Kennedy to Council, May 24, 1947.

²⁵ Minutes of Special Council, May 26, 1947.

lenient apprenticeship period.”²⁶ He argued, “The whole object of the stage managers’ petition is to raise the standing of the stage manager. This can only be done by raising the quality of the men in that line, and that can only be accomplished by keeping out the inexperienced and unfit.”²⁷ Instead of bearing any consideration to the matter, the Executive Council voted against the provision with little explanation in the meeting minutes or in Dullzell’s letter to Ross.²⁸ Yet again, stage managers’ apparent attempt to professionalize the field was abruptly rejected without explanation or counter-argument.

One of the most significant demands, and one that would have gone far to help stage management professionalize, was the call for a separate Equity contract for stage managers. A separate contract would allow stage managers to negotiate their own professionalization and working conditions because the needs of the stage manager would not have been lumped in with the priorities of the actors. This would have allowed stage managers to decide which items were worth bargaining over, rather than having the negotiation team concede stage management requests in favor of clauses that impact a higher percentage of AEA’s membership. Through the protection of a stage management contract, stage managers could have negotiated terms specific to the challenges facing the field. In 1942, the Executive Council argued against separate contracts for stage managers, claiming that if the union provided a separate contract for stage managers then other divisions would appear within the ranks of actors. Kennedy countered this by writing, “I think actors are reasonable enough to realize it affects only one or two members of a company at most and those in a specialized branch of the profession. So I suggest to Council that we stop using an actors contract which is a makeshift at best as far as stage managers are

²⁶ Kennedy to Council, May 24, 1947.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Minutes of Special Council, May 26, 1947; Dullzell to Ross, May 26, 1947.

concerned.”²⁹ Instead of agreeing on the use of a separate contract, the Executive Council voted to absorb all clauses stipulating stage management working conditions into the existing provisions listed in the AEA contract and rulebook. While this change was not reflected in the 1948 version of the Rules Governing Employment, a stage management section appeared in the 1952 edition.³⁰ In Dullzell’s letter to Ross, he notes, “The Council agreed, and so voted, that any sections of the stage managers’ petition that were approved by the Council at this meeting are to be made a part of the regular Equity standard production contract.”³¹ The Executive Council integrated stage management concerns into the regular contract, instead of creating a contract or rider specifically for stage managers. Had AEA allowed the stage managers to negotiate the terms of their own contract, AEA would have needed to acknowledge the distinct differences between acting and stage managing, which they were not prepared to face. As a result, this decision also served as another obstacle to stage management professionalization, as AEA continued to deny the distinctions between the two fields.

The last two demands in the 1947 letter on stage management grievances included separate minimum salaries for stock companies and for the implementation of a stage management advisory committee of three stage managers. Kennedy remarked that due to time constraints, it would be better to revisit stock negotiations after the summer season and recommended that the Executive Council investigate to ensure that each of the minimums offered were truly reflective of an average salary.³² Subsequently, the Executive Council tabled

²⁹ Kennedy to Council, May 24, 1947.

³⁰ 1948 Rules Governing Employment, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 1a; folder 28; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University; 1952 Rules Governing Employment, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 1a; folder 29; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

³¹ Ross to Dullzell, May 26, 1947.

³² Kennedy to Council, May 24, 1947.

the conversation until the next season.³³ Dullzell explained to Ross, “This section was tabled because of a feeling that with the number of summer stocks already lined up, it would be considered better to take this section up next season.”³⁴ Significantly, Kennedy did not address the stage management advisory committee, although he did recommend that the Executive Council, “do the just and equitable thing and give the stage manager the salary, working conditions and standing his job calls for and deserves.”³⁵ Most surprisingly, the advisory committee was approved by the Executive Council, but perhaps this was because the nature of the group was advisory and had limited voting power.³⁶ The creation of this committee did not guarantee that stage management issues would be treated fairly by AEA leadership, only that stage managers could weigh in and give their opinions on the issues brought to their attention.

Days after the AEA Executive Council met on May 26, 1947, trade publications began publishing the outcome. In response, Howard Lindsay, theatrical producer, playwright, librettist, director and actor, immediately wrote condemning AEA for approving such measures prior to the collective bargaining session that would ultimately affect his work. Lindsay was best known for collaborating with Russel Crouse on the writing of the play *State of the Union*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and the libretto for *The Sound of Music*. Lindsay writes, “I feel the use of the imperative tense is unfortunate at the time when we are trying to convince the President and the public that collective bargaining is done honestly and sincerely.”³⁷ In his letter to Dullzell, executive secretary for AEA, Lindsay claimed that banning stage managers and assistant stage managers from understudying and playing parts imposed a hardship on touring

³³ Minutes of Special Council, May 26, 1947.

³⁴ Dullzell to Ross, May 26, 1947.

³⁵ Kennedy to Council, May 24, 1947.

³⁶ Minutes of Special Council, May 26, 1947.

³⁷ Correspondence from Howard Lindsay to Paul Dullzell, 7 June 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

legitimate plays. He used his letter to threaten AEA that if the union continued with such a derisive measure, that “the additional burden to the salary list would mean that every actor in the cast would receive a smaller salary.”³⁸ While Lindsay agreed that stage managers should focus on their stage managerial duties, he maintained that stage managers must be willing to act in the event of an emergency, or else the show would not be able to go on. He questioned the inclusion of the assistant stage manager in this measure maintaining ASM duties were not nearly as overburdening as the stage manager’s. He closed, “I hope, indeed, the council still has an open mind in the problems of producing managers as they will be affected by the proposed regulations for stage managers, because it is the [mid-career actor] which is going to bear the burden.”³⁹ While there is no specific record that this letter reached the Executive Council or impacted the negotiations, the next Executive Council meeting proceedings insinuate otherwise.

The minutes reference the clause that prohibited stage managers and assistants from acting and understudying and noted that this clause was not included in the new agreement with The League of New York Theatres “because of Miss Brownstein’s feeling that this matter should be further considered by the Council.”⁴⁰ Miss Brownstein’s name should be familiar as the person who redirected Executive Council’s opinion on the 1942 memo on stage management grievances. As in 1942, Brownstein recommended that the matter be revisited in the future. Yet again, Brownstein and ultimately AEA, prioritized the needs of the producers and actors over the demands of the stage management community, signaling that while they wanted stage management to remain in the union, they preferred to keep the status quo. In doing so, AEA

³⁸ Lindsay to Dullzell, June 7, 1947.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Council Meeting Minutes, 29 July 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

would be able to maintain good relations with the producers and ensure the focus of the union remained on actors and acting without losing the important membership dues of stage managers.

In sum, only one of the 1947 demands was accepted without amendment (stage management advisory committee), one of the demands was accepted pending further investigation (the ban of stage managers as actors and understudies), two were amended to reflect current practices (paid pre-production work for both the stage manager and the assistant stage manager), and the remaining four were vetoed. Of the three approved clauses, one was irrelevant to the upcoming negotiation and the other two passages were merely clarifications on already negotiated clauses.⁴¹ AEA's approval of these items was merely a means of pacifying an outraged marginal community rather than demonstrating support for stage management's professionalization. Despite not achieving many of the things they wished, stage managers were publicly appeased by the progress made, and referenced their success in interviews with trade magazines.⁴² However, the stage management community continued to grow and build momentum in the recognition brought by the AEA's minor amendments. In fact, the stage managers met frequently over the summer to brainstorm means of achieving their goals. The quest was professionalization and it had not yet been achieved.

AEA AND TAFT-HARTLEY ACT OF 1947

Of course, the relationship between stage managers and the leadership of AEA and the results of the Executive Council meeting did not occur in a vacuum. In addition to pressure from

⁴¹ "Legitimate: Stage Mgrs. Win Concessions from Equity Council," *Variety* (Archive: 1905-2000), Jun 04, 1947, 51, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/magazines/legitimate-stage-mgrs-win-concessions-equity/docview/1285952427/se-2?accountid=14553>.

⁴² "Legitimate: Stage Managers make Headway on Contract." *The Billboard* (Archive: 1894-1960), Jun 07, 1947, 42, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/magazines/legitimate-stage-managers-make-headway-on/docview/1040080351/se-2?accountid=14553>.

producers and theatrical professionals, AEA also faced a growing anti-labor movement in the United States. During World War II, many labor unions refrained from making any major demands for the sake of national unity. Once it ended, union membership increased sharply as soldiers returned to the workforce and unions sought to regain some of the ground lost during the war. By 1946, over a third of the workforce was represented by the labor movement.⁴³ This led to a strike wave between 1945 and 1946 which disrupted the economy. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics, almost 3 million workers were involved in strikes in the first six months of 1946 and 4.6 million workers had participated by the end of the year.⁴⁴ “The conditions affecting workers in 1946 cut across industry lines, leading to the closest thing to a national general strike of industry in the twentieth century. The potential capacity of the workers to paralyze not just one company or industry but the entire country was demonstrated.”⁴⁵ Fearing another depression, the government, including President Truman, began taking direct action in an attempt to circumvent strikes.⁴⁶ The tension between the labor market, big business, and government culminated when the Taft-Hartley Act passed on June 23, 1947. The act drastically amended the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (NLRA, or Wagner Act) by severely restricting the activities and power of labor unions across the labor sector.⁴⁷ The Taft-Hartley Act was vetoed by President Truman on June 20, 1947 but received the congressional two-thirds

⁴³ Bill Wiese, “The 1946 Railroad Strike: Harry Truman and the Evolution of Presidential Power.” *Public Voices* 11 (2): 77–92.

<http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=60002991&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

⁴⁴ Joel Seidman, *American Labor from Defense to Reconversion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 235. <https://libcom.org/history/world-war-ii-post-war-strike-wave>

⁴⁵ “The World War II and Post-War Strike Wave,” Libcom, Published December 17, 2009, <https://libcom.org/history/world-war-ii-post-war-strike-wave>.

⁴⁶ For an interesting take on Truman’s relationship with unions, see Bill Wiese, “The 1946 Railroad Strike: Harry Truman and the Evolution of Presidential Power.” *Public Voices* 11 (2): 77–92.

⁴⁷ Dale Mineshema-Lowe, “Taft-Hartley Act of 1947,” *The First Amendment Encyclopedia: The Free Speech Center*: Middle Tennessee State University, Accessed: January 30, 2021, <https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/1050/taft-hartley-act-of-1947>.

majority necessary to override his veto and make Taft-Hartley a new law. Although the stage management files at AEA's archive do not reference the Taft-Hartley Act, this policy would have inevitably affected how the union responded to internal and external pressures threatening its bargaining power. As a result, AEA caved to external pressures, prioritizing its own bargaining power over the demands and professionalization of stage managers.

President Truman foresaw the challenges that unions like AEA would face if Taft-Hartley became law. The evening of his veto, he delivered a radio address to the general public, "I vetoed this bill because I am convinced it is a bad bill. It is bad for labor, bad for management, and bad for the country."⁴⁸ He noted the multiple dangers the Act would create for the economy, including an increase in strikes and complex pitfalls and procedures that would create new barriers to mutual understanding.⁴⁹ He continued, "But the Taft-Hartley bill is a shocking piece of legislation. It is unfair to the working people of this country. It clearly abuses the right, which millions of our citizens now enjoy, to join together and bargain with their employers for fair wages and fair working conditions. Under no circumstances could I have signed this bill."⁵⁰ Truman argued that the act itself was significantly more complex and damning than described to Congress, noting, "Much has been made of the claim that the bill is intended simply to equalize the positions of labor and management. Careful analysis shows that this claim is unfounded. Many of the provisions of the bill standing alone seem innocent but, considered in relation to each other, reveal a consistent pattern of inequality."⁵¹ In writing his lengthy rejection and in his

⁴⁸ Harry S. Truman, "Transcript of Truman's Radio Address from June 20, 1947: On the Veto of the Taft-Hartley Bill," Miller Center: University of Virginia, Accessed January 30, 2021, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/june-20-1947-veto-taft-hartley-bill>.

⁴⁹ Harry S. Truman, Letter titled "Veto of the Taft-Hartley Labor Bill," Harry S. Truman Library & Museum, June 20, 1947, Accessed January 30, 2021, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/120/veto-taft-hartley-labor-bill>.

⁵⁰ Truman, Radio address.

⁵¹ Truman, Letter.

presidential speech, Truman ensured his dissent was widely known. The bill was lengthy, complex and there was “more in this bill than meets the eye.”⁵² Truman noted in his presidential speech, “I am sure that very few understand what the Taft-Hartley bill would do if it should become law.”⁵³ Yet, three days later, congress overwhelmingly voted to override the veto. AEA would have been understandably preoccupied with the effects this bill might have on the union’s future. Perhaps AEA was too engaged with the national labor movement to consider the difficulties of the small stage management community, which only made up a small percentage of its members.

The Taft-Hartley Act prohibited unions from using certain techniques which put pressure on the employer to negotiate with unions, many of which strategies were used by AEA to win the 1919 strike that earned them their professionalization. One method called secondary strikes asked other unions to strike in hopes that their employers would put pressure on theatrical producers to negotiate with AEA. In addition, AEA spent much of the 1930s and 1940s promoting the benefits of a closed theatrical shop that would ensure all actors onstage were members of AEA.⁵⁴ The Taft-Hartley Act negated their efforts by forbidding the formation of a closed shop and allowed states to implement “right to work” laws. These laws undermined unions by allowing non-union members to work union contracts without the obligation to join and without the financial recompense (fees and dues) to keep the union functioning. As a result, AEA was focused on how the banning of closed shops would impact their collective bargaining rather than the seemingly insignificant demands of the stage management community.

⁵² Truman, Radio address.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ See Equity Magazine 1928-1947.

The Taft-Hartley Act also established the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) which gave the government the ability to investigate labor disputes and order injunctions against strikes.⁵⁵ The NLRB made final determinations regarding labor disputes and jurisdictions. President Truman wrote in the veto letter, “The bill time and again would remove the settlement of differences from the bargaining table to courts of law. Instead of learning to live together, employers and unions are invited to engage in costly, time-consuming litigation, inevitably embittering both parties.”⁵⁶ Once unions and management were embroiled in a trial, the bill mandated that the NLRB would “‘determine’ jurisdictional disputes over work tasks, instead of using arbitration, the accepted and traditional method of settling such disputes.”⁵⁷ This meant that if AEA formally defined stage management and the producers disagreed, the final determination would be left up to the NLRB, but only once a strike occurred or a bargaining party sued AEA for violating the law. The danger rests in the presidentially-appointed board members, as some presidents have stacked the board with pro-business members resulting in policies and decisions that did not benefit the worker.⁵⁸ Not wanting to risk an uncertain litigation process, AEA maintained that stage managers were actors with additional responsibilities. Even today, AEA leadership resists formally defining stage management in its contracts so that their jurisdiction over stage management remains safe. In formally defining stage management, AEA risks the NLRB’s involvement, which would have been particularly problematic in recent years as Former President Donald J. Trump stacked the NLRB with anti-union members, making a favorable

⁵⁵ Mineshema-Lowe, MTSU.

⁵⁶ Truman, Letter.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Justin Miller. "Trump's National Anti-Labor Relations Board". *The American Prospect Blogs*. July 18, 2017 Tuesday. <https://advance-lexis-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:5P22-KN81-JCMN-Y3H6-00000-00&context=1516831>.

determination unlikely.⁵⁹ As a result, stage management's professionalization process continues to be stalled as AEA prioritizes its own bargaining power over the potential professionalization benefits for stage managers.

In addition, Taft-Hartley Act redefined certain terms including "supervisor," making it so that supervisors were prohibited from organizing, unionizing and benefiting from the NLRA act. Contemporary stage managers are often misunderstood as enforcers and superiors, contributing to AEA's contemporary opinions against defining stage management. AEA is afraid that if stage management is formally defined that its definition would imply a position of oversight or authority. If so, the matter may require government mediation and force the NLRB to make the final determination as to whether stage managers are supervisors and therefore, whether they are eligible members of AEA. In the 1940s, AEA maintained that stage managers were merely actors with additional responsibilities because they feared that stage managers would choose to or be forced out of their union. When Taft-Hartley Act eliminated supervisors from the collective bargaining process, it threatened AEA's jurisdiction of stage managers. President Truman wrote in his lengthy veto letter, "[The Taft-Hartley Act] would bring on strikes by depriving significant groups of workers of the right they now enjoy to organize and to bargain under the protection of law. For example, broad groups of employees who for purposes of the Act would be classed as supervisors would be removed from the protection of the Act."⁶⁰ The union perpetuated a long-standing contradictory ideology that stage managers were simultaneously actors with additional responsibilities and, yet, too close to management to serve as AEA deputies. AEA's cognitive dissonance would have reinforced the need to perpetuate stage management's ties to acting rather than positing them as potential supervisors. In doing so, AEA removed the field's ability

⁵⁹ Miller.

⁶⁰ Truman, Letter.

to continue the professionalization process. Had stage management successfully professionalized, the Taft-Hartley Act would have made trouble for the burgeoning field because of its implied supervisory tasks. The stakes for both AEA and stage management were high. AEA's refusal to define and acknowledge stage management's distinct role in theatrical productions preserved their collective bargaining power, but it also led to consistent messages downplaying the significance of the stage manager, which persists today.

The Taft-Hartley Act politicized the labor movement and inserted government oversight into the economy. Democratic presidents and congresses have attempted to undermine the act's current hold over the labor movement but to minimal avail.⁶¹ As previously noted, former President Trump used his presidential power to ensure pro-business policies were implemented, undermining the middle and lower classes. There is hope, as President Biden has already taken steps to level the 2021 NLRB playing-field by firing Republican endorsed anti-union board and council members, who used their position on the NLRB to exploit the common worker.⁶² The next several months and years of the Biden administration may prove beneficial to the labor movement and could allow AEA to feel secure in formally defining stage management with minimal fear that the NLRB will determine stage managers are supervisors, thus allowing stage management to finally continue their professionalization process.

⁶¹ Mineshema-Lowe, MTSU.

⁶² Nicholas Waller. "How Joe Biden is empowering America's workers". *Newstex Blogs New Europe*. February 5, 2021 Friday. <https://advance-lexis-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:61XV-T311-JCMN-Y0BM-00000-00&context=1516831>.

STAGE MANAGERS SET UP SMA

A few months after AEA Executive Council mediated over the 1947 memo of stage management grievances, the stage managers voted to form the (first) Stage Managers' Association. It is important to note that this organization is different from the Stage Managers' Association founded in 1981, which still exists today. The stage managers hoped that the 1947 Stage Managers' Association (SMA) would act as a social and economic organization that would lobby AEA for stage management interests.⁶³ Given the limited headway made by the stage management community over the 1940s, it should be no surprise that such an organization was eventually formed.

Stage managers were elated over the Executive Council's approval to ban stage managers from acting in the shows they stage managed. The stage managers interpreted this triumph as recognition by Executive Council that the stage manager was a separate entity from the actor. This acknowledgement spurred the stage managers to form the Stage Managers' Association as a means to continue petitioning for a separate stage management Equity contract and a higher minimum wage specific to stage management.⁶⁴ During the summer of 1947, the community voted for Bill Ross, Eddie Dimond and Edward Mendelsohn to represent them on the stage management advisory committee.⁶⁵ Other leaders of the 1947 SMA included Moe Hack, Esther Snowden, Bill McFadden and Jerry Whyte, all of whom were active Broadway stage managers. Several had contributed to the 1942 and 1947 letters of stage management grievances. The

⁶³ "Legitimate: Stage Managers Vote to Set Up Own Association." *The Billboard* (Archive: 1894-1960), Jun 21, 1947, 46-47, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/magazines/legitimate-stage-managers-vote-set-up-own/docview/1040076016/se-2?accountid=14553>.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*; "Legitimate: Stage Mgrs. Organize; Ask Higher Pay Scale due to Exec Duties." *Variety* (Archive: 1905-2000), Jun 25, 1947, 51, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/magazines/legitimate-stage-mgrs-organize-ask-higher-pay/docview/1285964427/se-2?accountid=14553>.

⁶⁵ Correspondence from Norman H. Miller to Paul Dullzell, 26 June 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

Billboard trade magazine reported that the SMA aimed to “raise the standards of the entire profession so that producers [would] realize the value of a well-trained behind-the-scenes manager and use SMA talent.”⁶⁶ To do so, the association only accepted stage management members who had worked at least 30 weeks as an ASM or SM, with a minimum of three different shows.⁶⁷ The organization anticipated sharing job tips and increasing stage management opportunities by developing jurisdictional oversight in new mediums. While the SMA interpreted AEA’s concession as recognition that stage management was a separate field from acting, AEA leadership had not reconciled with this view, leading to tension between AEA and the newly-formed SMA.

On November 10, 1947, 136 paid-up members formalized their association by adopting a constitution, by-laws, and electing officers and a council to run the organization.⁶⁸ The 1947 SMA elected Bill Ross as president, John Effrat as Vice President, Esther Snowden as recording secretary, William Hammerstein as corresponding secretary and Norman Miller as treasurer.⁶⁹ The association was formed to “ advance, promote, foster and benefit stage managers and assistant stage managers.” The organization’s constitution suggested four methods in doing so: 1. Educational and fraternal programs, 2. Develop awareness of practical challenges facing stage managers and promote evidence-based best practices, 3. Advise and assist members in procuring work, and 4. Enhance the reputation for experienced stage managers and the field of stage

⁶⁶ “Stage Managers Vote,” *Billboard*.

⁶⁷ “Stage Managers Vote,” *Billboard*.

⁶⁸ “Legitimate: String-Pullers Pick Bill Ross.” *The Billboard* (Archive: 1894-1960), Nov 15, 1947, 42, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/magazines/legitimate-string-pullers-pick-bill-ross/docview/1040138765/se-2?accountid=14553>.

⁶⁹ “Legitimate-Concert: Stage Managers Assn. Elects Bill Ross Prexy.” *Variety* (Archive: 1905-2000), Nov 12, 1947, 57, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/magazines/legitimate-concert-stage-managers-assn-elects/docview/1285933953/se-2?accountid=14553>.

management.⁷⁰ These methodologies are similar to several of the subsets recognized in Wilensky's theory of professionalization. This insinuates that the 1947 SMA recognized that while the stage managers' advisory committee was a victory, it would not be enough to foster professionalization. Instead, the group dedicated time and resources to developing a professional organization within AEA that would aid them on the path to professionalization.

The 1947 SMA immediately set up committees that would achieve the above goals. This included a Good and Welfare committee, which consisted of three subcommittees including Education, Employment and Welfare. The membership committee oversaw the membership process, including but not limited to ensuring that all members met the required qualifications for membership. The entertainment committee was tasked with event planning, benefits, and reunions and the Auditing committee was in charge of finances. These committees, though short-lived, attempted to contribute to the professionalization process by defining qualifications for stage managers, educating the entertainment industry about the role of the stage manager, and providing continuing education to its stage management members. The Good and Welfare Committee also worked to develop employment opportunities for stage managers by contacting adjacent industries.⁷¹ For example, the committee encouraged the fashion industry to employ SMA stage managers for their fashion shows.⁷² The organization developed minimum hourly wage recommendations for stage managers employed by television and film studios and the SMA hoped to "bring professional standards to university and community playhouses."⁷³ The

⁷⁰ Stage Managers' Association (SMA) Constitution and By-Laws, November 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

⁷¹ SMA Constitution.

⁷² Report of the Committee on the Stage Managers' Association, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

⁷³ Correspondence from SMA to Vinton Hayworth, 4As Television Committee, November 21, 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University. "Television: Stage Mgrs. Set TV Wage Rates." *The Billboard* (Archive: 1894-1960), Dec 20, 1947, 14, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/magazines/television-stage-mgrs-set-tv-wage->

SMA wasted no time in scheduling lecture-presentations for its members that tackled stage management challenges. The first one was scheduled less than a month after the groups founding and invited long-time producers John Golden and Kermit Bloomgarden to address members on the relationship between the stage manager and producer.⁷⁴ Despite all of the employment and educational opportunities this group generated during its short existence, AEA leadership maintained that the group was a danger to the union at large and mandated that the 1947 SMA dissolve. The SMA's attempt at professionalization was subsequently squashed and stage managers were yet again forced to turn to AEA's bureaucratic process in their attempt to professionalize.

Although the association modeled the constitution and by-laws after AEA's, AEA leadership took issue with this group within a group. In an interoffice correspondence, Brownstein wrote to Dullzell, Agnes Duncan, and Turner, three of AEA's leaders, "I believe that [the newly formed Stage Managers' Association] should be thoroughly investigated because, as I see it, serious danger lurks in the possibility of a separate organization. The investigator should make a full report and, if necessary, we should have a joint conference about it."⁷⁵ Within two weeks, AEA Executive Council meeting minutes argued that the SMA's existence was in conflict with several resolutions adopted by AEA Executive Council on September 23, 1947.⁷⁶ The first was, "BE IT RESOLVED that no member of the Actors' Equity Association should continue to be a member of or support any organized movement or pressure group within Equity,

[rates/docview/1040105193/se-2?accountid=14553](https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/historical-newspapers/closing-ntc-session-gets-equity-aid-bid/docview/108022161/se-2?accountid=14553); "Closing NTC Session Gets Equity Aid Bid." New York Times (1923-Current File), Dec 01, 1947. <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/historical-newspapers/closing-ntc-session-gets-equity-aid-bid/docview/108022161/se-2?accountid=14553>.

⁷⁴ SMA Elects, *Variety*.

⁷⁵ Correspondence from Rebecca Brownstein to Paul Dullzell, Angus Duncan, Paul N. Turner, November 14, 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

⁷⁶ Council Meeting Minutes, December 2, 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

which seeks continuously to influence or control the Association's policies or whose principles are in conflict with the constitution of the Actors' Equity Association."⁷⁷ At this time, there were growing national concerns regarding communism and the Cold War. This resolution was most likely adopted in response to the Taft-Hartley Act, which stipulated that all leaders of unions must declare under oath that they were not communist and had no pro-communist tendencies. "The mere refusal by a single individual to sign the required affidavit would prevent an entire national labor union from being certified for purposes of collective bargaining."⁷⁸ Another AEA resolution stipulated that members who had organized into such a group or organization within AEA must immediately resign from such organizations or face disciplinary measures as determined by AEA's Executive Council.⁷⁹ AEA's Leadership expressed its concern to the Executive Council on December 2, 1947, "Your Executives and Legal Department believe [the Stage Management Association] represents a serious threat to Equity and Chorus Equity Association."⁸⁰ As such, AEA leadership advocated for the Executive Council to appoint a committee to investigate and make recommendations. In hindsight, the investigation acted as mollification before Brownstein and other AEA leaders delivered the ultimate death blow to the Stage Managers' Association, forestalling professionalization.

AEA Executive Council appointed John Kennedy as Chairman for the SMA investigation committee, having previously chaired the 1942 stage managers' memo of grievances committee. The Executive Council wrote to Kennedy, "We hope that you will accept this post because the Council felt that because of your background of experience in this field you would be best qualified to confer with them. It was the feeling of the Council that great dangers exist, in their

⁷⁷ Council Meeting Minutes, December 2, 1947.

⁷⁸ Truman, Letter.

⁷⁹ Council Meeting Minutes, December 2, 1947.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

constitution of dual unionism but that no arbitrary action should be taken without first investigating through a committee.”⁸¹ Kennedy was joined by Philip Ober, Ralph Bellamy and Raymond Massey, all of whom had prior experience as stage managers.⁸² Angus Duncan, Assistant Executive Secretary to AEA, and Brownstein were also listed as members of the committee.⁸³

On December 23, 1947, the investigation committee met with the leaders of the Stage Managers’ Association to discuss the Executive Council resolution and begin the inquiry. The minutes of the meeting established stage management’s intention to operate within the bounds of Equity’s jurisdiction. Running out of time, the investigative committee adjourned for the day, committing to meet the following day to develop recommendations. It is necessary to note that Brownstein and Duncan, the two official AEA representatives on the committee, were unable to attend the second meeting. Similar to the 1942 and 1947 committees that considered the two letters of grievances, these recommendations were developed without the stage managers’ biggest adversary, Rebecca Brownstein. The SMA investigative committee concluded that the Stage Managers’ Association had no other alternative motivation other than the group was determined to better their working conditions and professional standing within Equity. The investigative committee unanimously agreed that the problematic sections of the Constitution and By-laws could easily be “reworded by the legal department to remove any present or future

⁸¹ Correspondence from Angus Duncan to John Kennedy, December 3, 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

⁸² Correspondence from Angus Duncan to William Ross, December 3, 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University; Report of the Committee.

⁸³ Ibid.

danger to Equity.”⁸⁴ Therefore, the committee unanimously recommended to AEA Executive Council that once these changes be made, that the Association be allowed to continue.⁸⁵

The investigative committee felt justified and fair in its decision, preparing for the December 30, 1947 meeting when they would report back to Executive Council. A few days prior, Massey felt compelled to reiterate his thoughts in a letter to John Kennedy. “The part that these grievances still fan them is largely due to the apathy and lack of consideration on the part of Council. Council has failed to recognize that the stage managers, although few in numbers in our organization, have a vital and distinct element in our profession. They have different working conditions, divergent obligations and variant technical qualifications from the actor.”⁸⁶ AEA’s failure to wholeheartedly support the professionalization of stage management caused this process to stall. Given the national political atmosphere at the time, AEA was cautious in its dealings with the stage management community because AEA’s leaders were afraid that recognizing stage managers as a field and/or allowing the Stage Managers’ Association to exist would negatively affect AEA.

With each minor milestone that was approved by AEA Executive Council, the stage management community faced even greater challenges as they repeatedly sought the betterment of their field, while simultaneously being told that their work was only that of an actor. Massey argued, “it is essential that the stage managers remain members of the Equity family,” for the benefit of present and future stage managers and actors. He also argued that the educational and social benefits of the stage managers’ work would develop better stage managers and in turn

⁸⁴ Correspondence from Angus Duncan to William Ross.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Correspondence from Raymond Massey to John Kennedy, December 26, 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

would benefit all actors.⁸⁷ In doing so, Massey employed the tactic of tying stage management benefits to actor benefits, in order to increase the likelihood that such a statement would move the Executive Council to vote in favor of the stage managers. He begged, “[the stage managers] will remain with us if we recognize the necessity of solving their problems.”⁸⁸ And implied that if Executive Council continued to dismiss their concerns, the group would likely seek aid elsewhere.

As it turns out, Kennedy was unable to attend the Executive Council meeting that would tackle his committee’s report on the Stage Managers’ Association.⁸⁹ Instead, Philip Ober and Ralph Bellamy delivered the typed report to the Executive Council. In the report, the investigative committee described the background of the subject, reminding Executive Council members of the 1942 petition from 42 stage managers, which was followed by a 1947 petition signed by 127 stage managers. The letter emphasized the resemblances between the proposals and acknowledged the disappointment of the stage management field when they received the recurring denials. Kennedy wrote, “What the Committee wants to make very clear is, that [the current problem] had its beginning six years ago, and that Council is solely to blame for the present situation. We feel that had these men been given the recognition professionally and economically they asked, there would have been no Association formed. We also feel that it is Council’s duty to remedy this situation with all justice.”⁹⁰ This committee’s reproachful language obligated AEA Executive Council to reconsider their treatment and classification of the stage management community.

⁸⁷ Correspondence from Raymond Massey to John Kennedy, December 26, 1947.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Correspondence from John Kennedy to Angus Duncan, December 30, 1947, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

⁹⁰ Report of the Committee.

The investigative committee argued, “The great stumbling block in the past has been Council’s persistence in classing these men as actors. In no sense can they be so classified except when they play parts, which now has been forbidden, except in an emergency.”⁹¹ Kennedy referenced Bernard Sobol’s “Theatre Handbook” which defined the stage managers as, “The one person backstage in complete charge of the production and its performance, once the play has opened,”⁹² which was notably quite different from acting. Kennedy wrote, “Let me remind council... that a stage manager is ineligible to be a company deputy because it is felt that he is too close to the management and the nature of his duties is such that he is a supervisor. This is Equity’s own ruling, yet when he asks to be classified as a supervisor or technician he is told he is an actor. So we ask the Council to admit, if only for the sake of logical discussion, that the duties of a stage manager are different than those of an actor.”⁹³ Allowing this association to function within AEA will, at long last, recognize stage managers “as an important group doing a specialized work in the theatre [and] will give them a professional standing and a dignity which they deserve but lack, at the moment, except in individual cases.”⁹⁴ The Executive Council, having to face their contradictory logic was forced to acknowledge that stage management was a distinct field separate from acting. In doing so, stage managers achieved a small but necessary achievement towards professionalization.

The investigative committee recommended to AEA Executive Council that the Stage Managers’ Association be divided into two sections, one for the social, fraternal and educational activities and the other for economic. In addition, the committee suggested that the constitution and by-laws be studied and edited by the legal department. The committee ended their three-page

⁹¹ Report of the Committee.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

missive pointing out the dangers of dismissing the stage managers again, warning that the stage managers could form an underground organization to continue their work and/or that IATSE or some other union might be interested in representing stage managers. Just before the salutation, Kennedy took the opportunity to address one of the stage management demands despite its inappropriateness in the report, recommending that the Executive Council establish an appropriate minimum salary for stage managers.

In true Brownstein fashion, the lawyer responded to the report to Executive Council reiterating her concerns. “In my opinion, the mere changes in the constitution of that organization will not eliminate the potential dangers to this association in allowing a separate Stage Managers’ Association to exist.”⁹⁵ The letter insinuated that the final determination for the Stage Managers’ Association was ongoing and would continue into January 1948. According to *Billboard*, AEA’s concern with the Stage Managers’ Association was not with its present leadership, but out of concern for future “individuals who may control the org and thus make trouble for Equity.”⁹⁶ In reality, this concern stemmed from Brownstein, and as legal representation for the union, her opinions carried much weight. Unfortunately for the stage managers, Brownstein often put off stage management concerns with outright dismissal or by using “further investigation,” which forestalled the professionalization process for stage managers.

On January 20, 1948, almost exactly a year after the stage managers delivered their 1947 letter of stage management grievances, Executive Council made its decision regarding the Stage

⁹⁵ Correspondence from Rebecca Brownstein to Council, January 5, 1948, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 9; folder 46; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

⁹⁶ “General News: Equity Seeks SMA Safeguard.” *The Billboard* (Archive: 1894-1960), Jan 17, 1948, 45, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/magazines/general-news-equity-seeks-sma-safeguard/docview/1040078572/se-2?accountid=14553>.

Managers' Association. "The Equity Council has no jurisdiction over a purely social, educational or fraternal organization formed by our members, but absolutely forbids an organization within Equity that has any economic purpose or policy that may affect the welfare of Equity; and, therefore, the Council orders that the present Stage Managers' Association, as it is so constituted, be dissolved."⁹⁷ This setback was offset by the continuation of a stage managers club. While a social and educational organization would not directly benefit the economic issues facing the field, the stage managers used the new club to continue their stage management workshops and educational presentations to improve relationships between stage managers and the production team. Changing the professional organization to a social club also stalled the professional process. By dissolving the association, the field no longer had its own professional organization in which to arbitrate its professionalization. Stage managers would have to mediate their professionalization through AEA, which had already proved impossible. Any attempts to define stage management would have resulted in internal documents rather than being incorporated into official organizational policy, like contracts or labor agreements. As such, professionalization continued to stay just out of reach for stage managers.

AEA Executive Council finally admitted that stage managing was a separate career from acting, but the powerful group also limited the ways in which this recognition would favor stage managers economically and professionally. "The Actors' Equity Association Council is in agreement with the unanimous opinion of the committee to the effect that a stage manager's work and problems are different than those of any actor; and, therefore, the Council will appoint a standing committee on stage managers... to draw, to the attention of the Council, all matters

⁹⁷ Correspondence from Paul Dullzell to John Kennedy, January 21, 1948, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 11; folder 33; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

relevant to the work of stage managers.”⁹⁸ While the committee of twelve was certainly better than the three-person stage management advisory committee, the new Stage Managers’ Committee did not hold any substantive power to change the economic concerns facing stage managers. That power remained in the hands of the contract committees. Of the eight stage management requests that appeared in the 1948 contract negotiation, one was arguably already in the contract, and two were approved: the minimum wage for stage managers and prohibiting the stage manager from acting in the show.⁹⁹ Arguably, both of those points were prioritized because of Kennedy and Massey’s warnings that stage managers would seek representation elsewhere had AEA allowed either to be withdrawn. Even with these tiny victories, the stage management field failed to achieve professionalization, in part because these victories were actually pacifications to keep stage management in the union rather than victories that demonstrated stage management’s growing professional authority.

CONCLUSION

On February 9, 1948, the Stage Managers’ Association dissolved. In its place, 167 stage managers joined the Stage Managers’ Club, which was created to oversee the social, fraternal and educational outfits on behalf of its membership.¹⁰⁰ It retained a small membership fee and dues in order to plan for programming and activities. During the SMA’s dissolution meeting, Kennedy read AEA’s Executive Council resolutions, “Since [AEA Executive Council] feels that the stage managers problem is a different one than that of an actor, it will appoint a standing

⁹⁸ Dullzell to Kennedy, January 21, 1948.

⁹⁹ Actors Equity Association Contract Negotiations 1948, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 11; folder 24; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹⁰⁰ “Legitimate: Equity to Supervise SMA More Strictly.” *The Billboard* (Archive: 1894-1960), Feb 07, 1948, 46, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/magazines/legitimate-equity-supervise-sma-more-strictly/docview/1040000043/se-2?accountid=14553>.

committee on stage managers composed of twelve members, three of which will be Council members, and nine of which will be stage managers.”¹⁰¹ The Executive Council members on the Stage Management Advisory Committee were Kennedy, Bellamy, and Ober, with Massey as the alternate, and the stage managers were William Ross, Moe Hack, William MacFadden, Hugh Rennie, John Effrat and Ester Snowden.¹⁰² Despite upending their professional organization, the stage managers were placated with the formation of the social club and economic committee.

The report of the dissolution of the Stage Managers’ Association and the founding of the club/economic committee was published in every major trade magazine, demonstrating widespread interest.¹⁰³ The *Billboard* insinuated that this move would allow Actors’ Equity to “exercise stronger supervision over the Stage Managers’ Association (SMA).”¹⁰⁴ The *Billboard* wrote, “The council of the SMA feels that the stage managers have achieved a tremendous advance because Equity now admits that the backstage pilots have different problems and because a committee is now created to handle all problems of stage managers at Equity.”¹⁰⁵ And the *New York Herald Tribune* suggested that the short-lived association had accomplished its

¹⁰¹ Untitled Press Release, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 11; folder 33; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

¹⁰² Correspondence from Paul Dullzell to John Kennedy, February 4, 1948, Actors' Equity Association Records; WAG 011; box 11; folder 24; Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University; Press Release.

¹⁰³ Sam Zolotow. "Premiere Tonight of 'Doctor Social': Play Due At Booth Will Assist Cancer Research -- Jagger, Haila Stoddard In Cast." *New York Times* (1923-Current File), Feb 11, 1948. <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/historical-newspapers/premiere-tonight-doctor-social/docview/108330375/se-2?accountid=14553>; McCord, Bert. "News of the Theater: 'Doctor Social' Opens Tonight." *New York Herald Tribune* (1926-1962), Feb 11, 1948. <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/historical-newspapers/news-theater/docview/1327372117/se-2?accountid=14553>; “Legitimate: Equity Ends Stage Mgrs. Association.” *The Billboard* (Archive: 1894-1960), Feb 14, 1948, 43, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/magazines/legitimate-equity-ends-stage-mgrs-association/docview/1040004688/se-2?accountid=14553>; “Legitimate: Equity Dissolves Stage Mgrs. Assn.” *Variety* (Archive: 1905-2000), Feb 11, 1948, 49, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/magazines/legitimate-equity-dissolves-stage-mgrs-assn/docview/1285963955/se-2?accountid=14553>.

¹⁰⁴ “Legitimate: Equity to Supervise SMA More Strictly.” *The Billboard* (Archive: 1894-1960), Feb 07, 1948, 46, <https://search-proquest-com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/magazines/legitimate-equity-supervise-sma-more-strictly/docview/1040000043/se-2?accountid=14553>.

¹⁰⁵ “Equity Ends,” *Billboard*.

purpose.¹⁰⁶ AEA finally admitted that stage management was a separate field from acting, however, the advocacy for the field was short-lived. The true purpose of the Stage Managers' Association was to achieve professionalization and because of its' subsequent dissolution, the organization failed. Stage management's contractual successes convinced the stage managers to remain with AEA, even after the directors and choreographers left AEA to form their union in 1959. In 1981, the frustrated stage management community yet again gathered to form a second Stage Managers' Association. Its aims were quite similar to the original SMA: to advocate on behalf of the field. Unlike with the 1947 SMA, many of the members suggested leaving AEA to form their own labor union so that stage management concerns would be prioritized and no longer taken off the table due to the community's small size. Stage management continued to fail to professionalize within AEA's framework.

Contemporary stage management is still in need of professionalization. The field is regularly dismissed as secretarial in nature and its artistic value constantly questioned. If you were to ask a hundred stage managers for the definition of stage management, you would receive a hundred different answers because a concrete definition has never been articulated and adopted by Actors' Equity. Stage managers have stood in solidarity with actors since AEA's earliest days, and yet, AEA has continually dismissed stage management concerns and blocked all avenues to professionalization. Stage managers must face this history before attempting to professionalize, so that they may confront AEA's traditional methods of silencing and delaying the professionalization process.

¹⁰⁶ "Doctor Social," New York Herald Tribune.

CHAPTER 4:

A CODA: NOW WHAT? WHERE STAGE MANAGERS NEED TO GO

The COVID pandemic has shuttered most theatre companies for the foreseeable future, making this the ideal moment for stage management to reflect and advocate for professionalization. Building on the previous chapters' narrative, this dissertation fast-forwards to contemporary stage management to assess how the field of stage management must continue and finish its professionalization process in order to protect the field and those that work in it. As Amanda Spooner said in an interview with *American Theatre* referencing blockbuster film *The Devil Wears Prada*,

People are like, 'oh, well this is the way we've always done it, so we have to do it in this way in order to impress the Miranda Priestly of theatre. We have to do it this way because a million other girls would kill to have your job.' There's such a feeling of scarcity that nobody zooms out and goes, 'What did these expectations even mean? Why are they there? Why are we falling over ourselves to keep up with these expectations that have just run completely unchecked and become the working cultural norm?' Everyone would be fools to go back to full functioning venue-based theatre and not have changed any of this. I just have more faith in our community than that.¹

The professionalization process intrinsically questions the practices and norms of a field, which generates a productive debate and ultimately results in an agreed upon set of values and principles. Likewise, the professionalization process leads to protective measures that shield

¹ Jerald Raymond Pierce, "Managing the Stage, and Managing Expectations," *American Theatre*, published September 29, 2020, <https://www.americantheatre.org/2020/09/29/managing-the-stage-and-managing-expectations/>.

advocators of policy change and whistleblowers from repercussions. This means that stage management can safeguard the field and those who work in it through the structures and professional standards created during the professionalization process. Instead of relying on the perceived status quo, stage managers must use this historical research to challenge their contemporary understandings of who they are and what they do, which in turn, will give birth to questions about their future and ways that they can build a stronger and healthier future for U.S. stage managers. My archival research alongside recently published material will provide the foundation for this chapter as it explores four of the most important conversations that must take place before professionalization is achieved: defining and redefining the field, training/educating prospective members, settling on a professional organization and creating basic qualification standards. Just as the first definition will be far from perfect, these actions will be ongoing processes to be revisited and built upon.

CONFRONTING RACISM

Before we can dive into the heart of these questions, we must confront the inherently racist aspects of the professionalization process, as its main objective is the process of exclusion. Wilensky's reported practice of exclusion was centered on acquiring certain knowledge, training and experience. However, U.S. educational and loaning programs were and are institutionally racist, producing outcomes that favor white Americans. Instead of focusing on how theatre and stage management are structurally racist, this chapter will concentrate on how stage management could absorb anti-racist values into its professionalization process. As noted by Ibram X. Kendi:

“because racism is everywhere, policies that aren’t anti-racist are inherently racist.”² As the field turns to the professionalization process to fix many of the broken policies and practices that currently dominate it, stage management must be meticulous in which standards the field chooses to endorse in order to ensure that the field does not adopt racist or marginalizing dogma.

Both law and medicine have attempted to rectify the ways in which professionalization intentionally and unintentionally promoted white voices. If we look at law school enrollment, minority enrollment jumped from 11.23% of enrollees in 1987 to 31.01% in 2019 because law schools began considering the ways that people of color were inherently excluded.³ While these numbers are hopeful, it is still a far cry from the 40% of minorities represented in the U.S. Census.⁴ Sadly, stage management and Actors’ Equity Association have much work to do. According to the 2010 Census 60.32% of American residents are white/European Americans, yet 76.8% of national stage management contracts are given to White/European Americans.⁵ Even worse, 82.89% of Production (i.e. Broadway/commercial) stage management contracts and 81.5% of League of Resident Theatre (LORT) stage management contracts are given to White/European Americans.⁶ These numbers indicate that the union field, especially in contracts at the higher-paying level, are predominately given to white stage managers. This is not to say that those stage managers are not deserving of the role they have been granted, but that representation matters at all levels in theatre. As noted in the *Harvard Business Review*, “In a nutshell, enriching your employee pool with representatives of different genders, races, and

² Michael J. Bobbit, “Let’s Be Real: These Programs Won’t End Racism at Your Theatre,” *American Theatre Magazine*, published December 22, 2020, <https://www.americantheatre.org/2020/12/22/lets-be-real-these-programs-wont-end-racism-at-your-theatre/>.

³ “Law School Enrollment by Race & Ethnicity (2019),” Enjuris, accessed November 22, 2020, <https://www.enjuris.com/students/law-school-race-2019.html>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Actors’ Equity Association, “Diversity Report, 2016-2019 in Review,” Actors’ Equity Association, November 18, 2020, <https://www.actorsequity.org/news/PR/DandIReport2020/diversity-and-inclusion-report-2020>, p. 3 and 6.

⁶ Ibid, p. 12, and 15.

nationalities is key for boosting your company's joint intellectual potential. Creating a more diverse workplace will help to keep your team members' biases in check and make them question their assumptions. At the same time, we need to make sure the organization has inclusive practices so that everyone feels they can be heard. All of this can make your teams smarter and, ultimately, make your organization more successful, whatever your goals."⁷ As stage management attempts to professionalize, the field must make sure that there are a variety of voices and experiences present during the process to challenge our notions of equity and to ensure anti-racist pathways are successful.

In 2019 Enjuris, an independent legal resource, published a "Law School Enrollment by Race & Ethnicity" report to aid the field in diversifying enrollment. The authors theorize that Black students remain underrepresented in law schools because Black students are greatly underrepresented in undergraduate programs, especially at top universities.⁸ In addition, Black students tend to score lower on the Law School Admissions Test (LSATs), conceivably because the tests demonstrate racial bias.⁹ Since these scores are used to grant financial aid awards, these awards also privilege white applicants. Lastly, enrolled Black students have larger attrition rates and are more likely to drop out.¹⁰ Since the stage management field is currently undergoing professionalization, it is imperative that the field is mindful of how financial burdens and systemic racism gets built into these structures so that the field can creatively consider equitable solutions. In other words, stage managers need to promote an anti-racist professionalization

⁷ David Rock and Heidi Grant, "Why Diverse Teams Are Smarter," *Harvard Business Review*, published: November 4, 2016, <https://hbr.org/2016/11/why-diverse-teams-are-smarter>.

⁸ Enjuris, "Law School Enrollment..."

⁹ LaTasha Hill, "Less Talk, More Action: How Law Schools Can Counteract Racial Bias of LSAT Scores in the Admissions Process" *University of Maryland Law Journal of Race, Religion, Gender and Class*, 19, no. 2:313-338, <https://digitalcommons.law.umaryland.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1336&context=rrgc>

¹⁰ Enjuris, "Law School Enrollment..."

process that improves upon Wilensky’s work to ensure that the structures created for professionalization are not damaging to the anti-racist work that is currently being done around the country (See Appendix C and D). Instead of focusing the field’s efforts on a single-pathway to success (such as a college education or training program), stage managers need to create multiple equitable paths that will provide the experience and training necessary for success as a stage manager.

As noted by Michael J. Bobbitt, executive director of the Mass Cultural Council, [emphasis his] “we all have to acknowledge the problem and put our collective and creative brains together to redesign it. This means that we have to consider that *nothing in the American theatre industry practices to this point should be considered sacred, beyond question, or unchangeable.*”¹¹ The field of stage management must acknowledge the ways that professionalization aids systemic racism and work together to lead a new form of professionalization that generates the standardization and protections inherent in professionalized fields but in ways that guarantee anti-racist structures. Narda Alcorn and Lisa Porter generously offered several action points for stage managers to consider (see appendix C) including: dismantling perfectionism, awareness of language, active allyship, and compassion, transparency and holding space. Miguel Flores, R. Christopher Maxwell, John Meredith, Alexander Murphy, Quinn O’Connor, Phyllis Smith, and Chris Waters, continued the conversation in their article (see appendix D) to include slowing down the stage management urgency to address microaggressions, restructuring the production schedule for better work/life balance for everyone, expecting and accepting mistakes, and addressing power-hoarding amongst stage

¹¹ Michael J. Bobbitt, “Boards are Broken, So Let’s Break and Remake Them,” *American Theatre Magazine*, published January 5, 2021, https://www.americantheatre.org/2021/01/05/boards-are-broken-so-lets-break-and-remake-them/?fbclid=IwAR1Mkqgp_9NB1xi7Z_Ym3m2zfppPo3OCTTdnNBKmaWRv-NRQaUW5Sp8y78M.

management teams. Both articles build on the work started by the “We See You White American Theatre” collective, which published actionable items to promote anti-racist policies in White American theatre institutions. This chapter builds on the work generated by these authors and relies heavily on the actionable points discussed in “WSYWAT”, “Anti-racism in Stage Management Education” and “Hold Please.” To continue this great work, Appendix E is an action point bullet list of conversations and questions the field must discuss to mediate an anti-racist professionalization process. In each of the following subsections, this chapter will discuss the ways that stage managements’ historical understandings, contemporary status quos, and anti-racist policies must be negotiated to create stronger definitions, training, organizations, and qualifications for stage managers.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING THE FIELD

Perhaps the most important debate toward professionalization is defining the role of the stage manager. This conversation has been percolating in stage management circles in the background, but has recently warranted working group status in AEA and the SMA. In order to obtain a professional status, the field needs to negotiate an acceptable definition of stage management. However, the stage management community and organizational leaders are divided about whether or not a definition would best serve the field. Some individuals fear a definition will take away duties that are fundamentally stage management because these tasks could be perceived as supervisory. This concern is understandable, but without a concrete definition, stage managers have no claim to exclusive technical competence and, therefore, the benefits of professionalization will stay out of reach.

Harold L. Wilensky reasons that occupations aiming for professionalization “must find a technical basis for it, assert an exclusive jurisdiction, link both skill and jurisdiction to standards of training, and convince the public that its services are uniquely trustworthy.”¹² Stage management’s technical competence should cover well-known labor such as productivity suite knowledge, creation of documents and recording the show, but must expand into the emotional and invisible labor performed by the stage manager. Stage management is often described as the communication hub, but the training for stage managers is limited to the technical aspects of written communications. Conflict management and relationship management need to be elevated to focus on how qualified stage managers aid the production process with their emotional intelligence. The general public and the theatrical community need to recognize the importance of having qualified stage managers at the helm of their productions. Stage managers need to demonstrate the value of such expertise and the devastating outcomes of hiring non-stage managers to stage manage. The field needs to collect, make note and publicize the number of extra hours performed by production stage managers when non-stage managers are hired as assistants. Stage managers need to go beyond the internal memos used by their historical associates in the 1940s and gather the intel that demonstrates harm: financially, physically, emotionally and mentally, to make lasting change in how the field operates.

Stage managers must demonstrate a strong service ideal, which Wilensky describes as the devotion to the client’s interests over personal or commercial profit, especially when the two are in conflict.¹³ The service ideal is built into the stage management cognizance, as the production should always come first, often to the field’s detriment. Stage managers must navigate through

¹² Harold L. Wilensky, “The Professionalization for Everyone?” *American Journal of Sociology* 70, no. 2 (1964): 138. Accessed April 10, 2020. www.jstor.org/stable/2775206.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 140.

all the needs and desires of the production team to ultimately decide how rehearsal and technical time will be spent. While this is a collaborative effort, it is ultimately up to the stage manager whether or not a costume quick change is repeated one last time or if time will be set aside at the end.¹⁴ Some will argue that all theatrical workers serve the production, however those artists are focused on a particular aspect of the production (costumes, set, lighting, acting, budget, etc.) Their goal is make sure that their piece of the puzzle is finished to the best of their ability. It is the stage manager's job to take a step back, see all the pieces of the puzzle and make sure that all of the pieces come together to safeguard the production and its participants.

In addition, stage managers are often guilted into being accessible 24/7 during productions, abusing the service ideal that runs rampant in the field and leading to high rates of burnout. As stated in "Managing the Stage and Managing Expectations," Jerald Raymond Pierce notes, "Say a stage manager has learned over the years that they work best if their Mondays are email-free, but they're on a production where other members of the production team expect a stage manager to respond to those Monday emails. In a field where issues like these are not fully spelled out in contract language, and in an open market of freelancers where a seemingly inflexible stage manager could easily be replaced, the challenge becomes how to remain competitive while protecting mental health and personal boundaries."¹⁵ Stage management's service ideal needs to be exposed and broadcast to the general public. Stage managers need to consider how to promote healthier ways of achieving a service goal without risking the stage manager's physical, emotional or mental health, which needs to be built into the definition of stage management.

¹⁴ This is not to say that the stage manager is dictatorial in this collaborative moment but instead says, "Hey, I think we would better serve the production if we move on from here because of xxxx. We will revisit this change at xxx time."

¹⁵ Pierce, "Managing the Stage..."

In preparation for one of the later steps of professionalization, stage management needs to consider the legal protections it wishes to have and consider those protections when drafting their definition. Wilensky notes, “In short, the degree of professionalization is measured not just by the degree of success in the claim to exclusive technical competence, but also by the degree of adherence to the service ideal and its supporting norms of professional conduct.”¹⁶ The purpose of the definition of stage management is to stress the technical competence required to productively stage manage while also emphasizing the stage manager’s service ideal. The clearer the definition and the area of competence, the easier it will be to create legal protection for the field, if desired. Wilensky maintains that legal protection is not an integral part of the professionalization process, but could be a welcome outcome.¹⁷ For stage managers, this legal protection could include a licensing or certification process prior to obtaining work. This process could be as regimented as licensing for when someone practices medicine or law (wherein a person could be jailed or fined for practicing without such licensing), or as relaxed as the certification process associated with fight and intimacy direction (which are recommended and beneficial to producers, but not always required.) Even theories of acting have subscribed to accreditations for teaching certain methods to incoming students. There is precedence for such protocol and would safeguard those that practiced or taught stage management.

Stage management should not limit its definition to production stage management, but expand to explicitly include definitions for assistant stage managers, production assistants and stage management interns. AEA’s refusal to clearly define the field has led to competent AEA stage managers taking work on Broadway as production assistants¹⁸ without the benefit of union

¹⁶ Wilensky, 141.

¹⁷ Ibid, 145.

¹⁸ In theory, Production Assistants are stage-managers-in-training similar to interns and often work for free or for a small stipend. Some Production Assistants, specifically those at larger regional theatres and Broadway make an

protection, health insurance and pension. During the 2016-2017 Broadway season, 95% of the shows used Equity members as production assistants.¹⁹ This practice is not sanctioned by the union, but because Broadway production assistants and interns are not considered within AEA's jurisdiction, this problem continues to exist. Production assistants are often AEA members in New York, but its western counterparts are prohibited from taking such positions.²⁰ Production assistants should be covered by AEA contracts, which will provide more work for AEA stage managers and be structured so that early career stage managers can receive the experience necessary to thrive in stage management or assistant stage management positions. As already noted, internships should be paid a living wage to allow anyone to join the field, not just those with financial access. The inclusion of these additional titles will allow the stage management's professionalization to expand to protect the individuals who perform stage management tasks under alternative titles.

hourly minimum wage. There is often an implied educational component, wherein the stage manager teaches the production assistant about the job.

¹⁹ Amanda Spooner, "(I swear this will be my last post today...) Attention AEA Stage Managers! PARTICULARLY THOSE WITH CONSTRUCTIVE THOUGHTS ABOUT AEA MEMBERS WORKING AS PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS. During Monday's National Membership meeting at Actors' Equity Association, there was a GIANT STEP FORWARD regarding the issue of Equity members working as Production Assistants without AEA contracts and benefits. A group of Stage Managers, led by Jakob W. Plummer and including me, stood up to speak about the realities of the PA situation-- to a room filled with shocked faces, gasps, and genuine anger. Most of the attendees, naturally almost entirely Actors, were disgusted to hear of the working conditions PAs face and the compensation practices. Jakob shared well-researched facts that included this: 95% of the shows in the '16/'17 Broadway season used Equity members as PAs. The great news: it not only got the attention of everyone in attendance BUT also prompted Kate Shindle to speak at the podium - while the topic was on the floor - and make a commitment to prioritize and fix the issue. Mary McColl will be meeting with Jakob, Kate, and a small group of us to further discuss the issue and consider the next steps. Before we go any further, it felt important to me to open up space to talk about this together in a town hall setting. Tandem (the peer-to-peer education program I founded) will be renting a studio in midtown Manhattan on Monday, April 30, from 7:30-9:30pm. This is your chance to have your voice heard-- even if you disagree that it's an issue in the first place. Let's organize our community and ensure communication surrounding this movement-- a movement that could affect all of us. Let me know if you have any questions. Or feel free to reach out to Jakob directly at jakobplummer at gmail dot com RSVP FOR THE EVENT BY RESPONDING TO STAGEMANAGER1234 AT GMAIL DOT COM. These events are always free and latecomers are always welcome. Hope to see you there." Facebook, April 25th, 2018. https://www.facebook.com/groups/unofficialaeasms/?post_id=1993114997683130

²⁰ Pierce, "Managing the Stage..."

Creating a definition will allow the field to separate the competent from the incompetent, and this is where the field absolutely must commit to anti-racist policies. It is essential that stage managers find ways to separate competencies that are not inherently unfair to minority voices. If stage managers focus on training and experience as a means to define competence, then the field needs to ensure that obtaining either is not barred with steep tuition prices or financially unfeasible internships. The field must promote newly founded scholarships like the Cody Renard Richard Scholarship, which strives to financially assist Black, Asian, Latinx, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) in theatre.²¹ The field must offer and amplify financially feasible educational opportunities, like Broadway Beyond, which recently offered portfolio and resume advice to BIPOC stage managers.²² Opportunities that promote and engage BIPOC stage managers will help close gaps in training and knowledge.

The field should anticipate internal conflict throughout this process as practitioners come from varying backgrounds. There will be push back on the definition itself and the field's choice to restrict stage management contracts to those willing to go through the training. This conflict should be viewed positively, as it will ensure that the field is questioning the ways that they are restricting the field for equity. Others will be concerned about losing the ambiguity and individuality ubiquitous to the field. But as noted in *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society* (2005), "occupations choose the professionalization path to attain societal kudos, but, in doing so, their members agree to subject their own attitudes, skills and conduct to the discipline of verifiable expertise, collective rules and constraints. This aspect of professional status, the voluntary tempering of individuality, is a prerequisite to forging a professional identity, mission, and core

²¹ For more information, see the scholarship's website: <https://www.codyrenard.com/scholarship>.

²² Broadway & Beyond: Access for Stage Managers of Color, accessed: March 1, 2021, <https://www.broadwaybeyondaccess.com>

knowledge base that society can recognize. If members of an occupation do not meet this challenge, their professional ambitions will not be realized.”²³ Standardizing and professionalizing the field will aid stage management’s plight, whereas retaining their individuality will not allow the field to professionalize. Ultimately, there will be a contest between those who firmly believe that stage managers should remain silent, invisible and preserve its individualism, and those who are interested in improving working conditions not just for the stage management field but for the casts and crews as well. Stage managers should not back down from these conflicts, but instead should listen, collect data, and make decisions based off that evidence.

The field has slowly adapted from its directorial beginnings to its current conception. Stage managers have patiently waited for stage management to come into its own, but instead it has slowly blended into the background, convincing many stage managers that recognition was not necessary. Working conditions for stage management have not improved much over the last hundred years. Many of the aspirations recorded in the memos from the 1940s continue to be the field’s aims today. Eighty years ago, the field’s predecessors sought AEA’s recognition that stage management was a specialized field, warranting its own professional standing. AEA only recently allowed members to self-identify as stage managers.²⁴

AEA continues to deploy singular policies that meet the challenges faced by actors, but fails to resolve the same issues for stage managers. One such example is the way in which the union assists with obtaining work. AEA actors have distinct benefits when auditioning, with contractual rules that require auditions to take place in certain cities and mandating that AEA

²³ Sue McKemish, Michael Piggott, Barbara Reed, and Frank Upward, *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*, (Elsevier Science, 2005) 53, Google Books.

²⁴ Actors Equity Association, “Working Towards Intentional Inclusion”, Actors’ Equity Association, Winter 2019, <https://www.actorsequity.org/resources/diversity/diversityblog/IntentionalInclusion/>.

actors be able to sign up for specific audition times instead of a cattle call.²⁵ Unlike with acting auditions, producers have no such compulsory call for stage management resumes. Instead, producers voluntarily post on the AEA member portal when desperately in need of new stage managers. This means that stage management gigs are given to people the producers have worked with or are recommended, rather than allowing for a diversity of applicants that an open call for resumes would provide. This also disadvantages the AEA stage managers who are known to advocate for reasonable workplace accommodations and compensation, and continues to advance an idea that AEA stage managers must go-with-the-flow and be available 24/7 or be replaced. AEA maintains that stage managers are permitted and encouraged to sign up for an audition slot to get their names, resumes and faces in-front of theatre producers, but anecdotal stories tell otherwise. The theatre's chosen representatives are unprepared to meet with stage managers and are often not involved in the hiring of stage management teams. Instead of grouping stage managers and actors together, AEA must acknowledge the distinctive role stage managers play in theatre and provide opportunities and support specific to their needs.

Currently, AEA leadership is adamant that any stage management definition excludes any implication of management status to prevent stage managers from being vulnerable to legal repercussions or culpable for mismanagement. As a result, AEA has long overlooked the field's most important managerial duties: overseeing the production and managing the process from preproduction to closing night. Many of the duties associated with stage managing, such as creating a schedule, overseeing rehearsals, and working with understudies, are managerial. In

²⁵ Cattle Call is the colloquial term to describe an audition wherein a large number of actors show up, get in line and often wait several hours for the opportunity to audition in front of the casting director and/or producers; Actors' Equity Association, "Agreement And Rules Governing Employment In Resident Theatres," Actors' Equity Association, Last updated: February 13, 2017, 4–11, https://members.actorsequity.org/on-the-job/rulebookslibrary/lort_rulebook_17-22.pdf.

addition, AEA and others are concerned because supervisors are traditionally excluded from the labor movement, so in order for stage managers to remain in AEA, the definition will need to pass the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) test for supervisory roles.

The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), enacted in 1935 by Congress, allowed employees the right to collectively bargain and set the definition for employee, employer and supervisor.²⁶ In 1947, Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act, which served as a check for the growing power of labor unions. Among many things, the Taft-Hartley Act amended the original NLRA to exclude supervisors from collective bargaining units.²⁷ This move was significant for stage managers who often have to walk a tight line between enforcing contractual rules and participating in the collective bargaining.

Today, the NLRA states that the term employee “shall include any employee ... but shall not include any individual ... employed as a supervisor.”²⁸ Supervisors are defined as “any individual having authority, in the interest of the employer, to hire, transfer, suspend, lay off, recall, promote, discharge, assign, reward, or discipline other employees, or responsibly to direct them, or to adjust their grievances... [and] exercise[ing]... such authority requires the use of independent judgment and is not merely routine or clerical.”²⁹ The Congressional Research Committee notes that “an employee’s job title does not determine whether the employee is a supervisor.”³⁰ Contemporary stage managers do not traditionally have the authority to hire, transfer, suspend, lay off, recall, promote, discharge, reward, or discipline the actors or crew

²⁶ For more information about the NLRA see: <https://www.nlr.gov/guidance/key-reference-materials/national-labor-relations-act>.

²⁷ For more information about the Taft-Hartley Act see: <https://www.nlr.gov/about-nlr/who-we-are/our-history/1947-taft-hartley-substantive-provisions>.

²⁸ “National Labor Relations Act,” National Labor Relations Board, accessed: January 2, 2021. <https://www.nlr.gov/guidance/key-reference-materials/national-labor-relations-act>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Gerald Mayer and Jon O. Shimabukuro, “The Definition of ‘Supervisor’ Under the National Labor Relations Act,” Congressional Research Service, July 5, 2012, 1, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL34350.pdf>.

under their supervision. Stage managers do prepare understudies to substitute or replace other cast members, but these situations are usually guided by protocols set up by the producers.

Nevertheless, stage managers may face difficulties getting around the term “assign.” In 2006, the NLRB established new definitions for three key terms that are used to identify supervisors for purposes of the NLRA: to “assign” and “responsibly to direct” employees and to exercise “independent judgment.” “The NLRB concluded that the term ‘assign’ should be construed to refer to the act of designating an employee to a place (such as a location or department), appointing an employee to a time, or giving significant overall duties or tasks to an employee.”³¹ Stage managers create and send out the rehearsal schedule and it could be argued that they “assign” the cast and crew arrival/departure times, even though this is often dictated to the stage manager based on the needs of the production team.

The NLRB maintains that “responsibly to direct” applies to “individuals who not only oversee the work being performed, but are held responsible if the work is done poorly or not at all.”³² This poses another potential problem for stage managers, as some producers and theatrical employees hold the stage manager responsible for things that go wrong during the course of a show. It is also representative of how many seasoned stage managers will argue that stage managers can and should be held responsible. But if this is the case, then stage management should surely leave AEA because such responsibility is indicative of a supervisory position and eliminates stage management from the protections of the NLRA and the labor movement.

“With regard to the term “independent judgment,” the NLRB maintained that at a minimum an individual must act or effectively recommend action that is ‘free of the control of others and form an opinion or evaluation by discerning and comparing data.’ The Board further

³¹ Mayer, “Definition of Supervisor,” 4.

³² Ibid, 4.

elaborated that a judgment is not independent if it is dictated or controlled by detailed instructions in company policies, the verbal instructions of a higher authority, or the provisions of a collective bargaining agreement.”³³ Stage management is frequently called on to use independent judgement in emergency situations. There is usually protocol in place for the implementation of understudies and/or what to do in the event of an emergency onstage. However, as definitions evolve over time, the NLRB may change this definition to include actions often carried out by the stage manager in a crisis.

If AEA is greatly concerned about how a definition may affect stage management’s standing within the labor union, the union and its members should advocate for congress to revisit the Re-Empowerment of Skilled and Professional Employees and Construction Tradesworkers (RESPECT) Act (S. 2168), which set out to revise the NLRA’s definition of a supervisor in 2012.³⁴ Currently, employees are categorized if 10-15% of their activities fall under supervisory tasks, whereas the act would increase the percentage to over 50%. The RESPECT Act would also eliminate “assign” and “responsibly to direct them” from the list of supervisory duties. The Congressional Research Service identified foreman and employees with similar duties as those who could benefit most from these changes as the Act would allow them the same protections as other employees under the NLRA.³⁵ The passing of this bill would make it easier for stage managers to remain in AEA once the field has been fully defined.³⁶ The risks are great, as the NLRB could rule that stage managers should be considered supervisory, upending years of

³³ Mayer, “Definition of Supervisor,” 4.

³⁴ For more information about the RESPECT Act (S. 2168) see: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/112th-congress/senate-bill/2168/text?r=93&s=1>.

³⁵ Mayer, “Definition of Supervisor,” 7.

³⁶ According to notes in NLRB v Harrahs club case, the board found the respondent’s contention that the ASM was a supervisor without merit. This demonstrates that AEA’s concerns over stage management’s definition is potentially without cause as the 1968 case sets precedence that ASM’s are not supervisors. For more information see: <https://www.courtlistener.com/opinion/282416/national-labor-relations-board-v-harrahs-club/>

functioning within the union. However, the rewards of professionalization would create protections and prevent the exploitation of stage managers. Stage managers must decide if they want to continue to walk the delicate line between preserving the limited authority they have and remaining in a “non-supervisory” capacity or lobby for something different.

Perhaps through the process of defining stage management, the Stage Managers’ Association (SMA) can gain a foothold as a professional organization. However, it will need the support of each of the existing stage management affiliated unions’ including AEA, the American Guild of Musical Artists (AGMA), which represents Opera Stage Managers and the Directors Guild of America (DGA), which represents television and film stage managers, before it can succeed. Bear in mind that there will be conflicting definitions of what stage management is as AEA represents specifically the stage managers associated with live theatrical performances, whereas the DGA represents directors and stage managers for film/television and each category has different challenges that it faces. As such, the inherent definitions will and should be drastically different. Where AEA and the DGA will need to be specific in its definition, the SMA will need an overarching definition with more specific definitions associated with each of the genres it wishes to cover.

If AEA continues to refuse to acknowledge the field’s unique position, stage managers must initiate a great debate through the alternative paths of education and evidence-based investigations of the field. Stage managers can begin the defining and redefining process without AEA’s oversight and reach out to university training programs to impart the most important stage management skills, knowledge and training. This will give stage managers time to gather proof of the field’s claims (distinctive role, exclusive knowledge and sole jurisdiction). Once evidence of the mission’s import has been collected, stage managers can appeal to AEA

leadership for support in the field's endeavors. If AEA continues to refuse, stage management may be faced with a difficult choice: remain in the current status quo or join/create a different labor union.

The entire field must participate in this process of determining whether stage management is a distinctive profession, what those professional tasks are, and how to raise the quality of recruits, etc. Stage managers must center the definition around the emotional and invisible labor in addition to the tangible tasks associated with stage management. As the middle-management system in theatre, stage managers serve as leaders to the production process without the authority associated with supervisors according to the NLRA. Defining the long-overdue boundaries for the field will curb the exploitation of labor that currently exists at all levels of theatre. Codifying the field will allow stage managers to expand research and create best practices or evidence-based policies that will help govern what they do and how they do it. Defining the field is paramount to professionalization, but stage managers must also recognize that the way the field views this definition must be flexible. As a starting point, I suggest the following definition: Stage managers are trained specialists who prioritize and advocate for the production/production process itself. Stage managers lead, facilitate and safeguard the production from pre-production to closing performing labor in the following categories: interdepartmental collaboration, idiosyncratic administration, artistic leadership and bookkeeping/archival curation. Stage managers will need to return to this description regularly, adjusting it for the pitfalls and challenges that will appear. Just as Congress continues to modify the original NLRA definitions of "employee," "employer," and "supervisor," so will stage management need to continue to amend its initial definition.

TRAINING/EDUCATING PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS

Once stage management has decided on an initial definition and considered each of the tenets described earlier, the field must turn to the training and/or educating of prospective members. As of this writing, stage managers do not need any previous experience before signing an AEA stage management contract. However, 28% of stage managers who participated in the 2019 Stage Manager's Survey earned a BFA or MFA in stage management.³⁷ Only 11% of participants reported no formal stage management education.³⁸ This indicates that an overwhelming number of new stage managers are beginning their careers with at least an undergraduate class on Stage Management. Because of this, the field must ensure that such training programs are providing the right tools, skills and knowledge to join the profession.

Currently, there is a huge disconnect between collegiate education and the realities of professional stage management work, especially at undergraduate colleges without a professional stage manager on faculty. Lessons revolve around the tangible aspects of stage management: how to tape a floor, record the blocking and create a spreadsheet. Some courses imply or discuss how to handle conflict management or build relationships, but often the lessons are superficial at best. Stage management faculty must analyze how stage management is being taught in educational programs to ensure that the knowledge, skills, and values that are being passed on correctly reflect the field's current expected knowledge, skills and values. In addition, stage management faculty must consider the actual end goals and objectives of the course and create course work and lectures that help students achieve these goals. Training programs need to be dissected, scrutinized, and overhauled to create curriculum that better reflects stage management.

³⁷ David J McGraw and Tara Patterson, *2019 Stage Manager Survey*, (SM-Sim, LLC: April 2020), 13, http://www.smsurvey.info/uploads/6/4/6/6/6466686/2019_stage_manager_survey.pdf.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

For example, student stage managers are taught to record absences and tardiness in the rehearsal/performance report. The implication is that student stage managers must address tardiness during or shortly after the rehearsal, which can lead to student stage managers intimidating or discriminating against student actors. This leads to a division between the cast and the stage management team, which arguably transfers as students graduate and enter the profession, carrying over the assumption that stage managers are disciplinarians. AEA has made it clear in membership meetings that while AEA stage managers should record such events for documentation purposes, AEA stage managers should not serve as disciplinarians, especially for their union peers. In other words, the AEA stage manager's role is as a liaison between conflicting parties, rather than as an adjudicator/disciplinarian. As such, emotional intelligence and conflict management must be reflected in stage management coursework and in theatre departments. To remove the student stage manager from disciplining, the department's faculty should develop and establish consequences for all productions, clearly communicate those consequences to their students, and ensure that such consequences are fairly upheld across all productions and people.

As noted by Ira Mont, in reference to the actor's relationship with the stage manager, "My conversation with you or my pointing something out to you or asking you to do something is not coming from a disciplinary perspective. Not only are we in the same union, we're there together putting on the same show. We are symbiotically linked."³⁹ The field must foster these healthier outlooks amongst student peers and help them build working relationships rather than positing the stage manager as supervisory. This is not to say that the stage manager should not be

³⁹ Pierce, "Managing the Stage..."

a leader in the rehearsal room, but only to note that there is huge chasm between leader and disciplinarian.

Instead of simply training students in a set of skills and tasks, whether performed assertively or invisibly, programs should educate stage managers in emotional intelligence, leadership styles and conflict resolution. Jerald Raymond Pierce argues, “this clarification was repeated in multiple recent interviews: that the job of a stage manager extends far beyond the expectations that they are simply timekeepers, paperwork clerks, or rehearsal room rule enforcers. That job description is far too narrow, as it leaves out an entire side of the stage manager’s role – a role that, especially now in the era of COVID and calls for racial justice and the declared year of the stage manager, has become increasingly important to acknowledge.”⁴⁰ Stage management courses need to reflect the field’s reality, which centers around emotional intelligence in order to properly prepare them for the situations they may face in student, community and professional theatrical productions.

In addition, stage management programs should assess how to end predatory behavior within their departments. Student stage managers submersed in competitive departments perpetuate this behavior in their professional experiences. Instead of reinforcing the competition, departments must co-elevate stage management students and emphasize a teamed approach to stage management. The authors of “Hold Please” note, “Each member of the stage management team is working to achieve the same goal of a safe and smooth production. Having multiple points of view and avenues to turn to for information doesn’t reduce this goal but rather expands it.”⁴¹ This collaborative approach will relieve the pressures of competition within the department

⁴⁰ Pierce, “Managing the Stage...”

⁴¹ Miguel Flores, R. Christopher Maxwell, John Meredith, Alexander Murphy, Quinn O’Connor, Phyllis Smith, and Chris Waters, “Hold, Please: Addressing Urgency and Other White Supremacist Standards in Stage Management,” Howlround, created October 15, 2020, <https://howlround.com/hold-please>.

and foster trust and support amongst student stage managers, which will in turn create a support system for the stage managers after graduation.

The field must consider the objectives of stage management training. This should include questioning what is being taught, why it is being taught, and the metrics on which such learning is being evaluated. Stage management coursework often perpetuates perfectionism, requiring student stage managers to create perfect paperwork without mistakes by taking points off for each error. Some professors require every student to create their own unique set of templates, requiring that each student's paperwork be noticeably different from their peers' paperwork. The objective being that each student has created every piece of paperwork themselves including prop list, character breakdown, scene breakdown, etc. In reality, this objective can be met with a more collective assignment, assigning each student a different piece of paperwork to create and share with the class. By focusing on the process, rather than quantity, of paperwork created, each student will become familiar with the office productivity suite, without the overwhelming burden of creating ten to twenty pieces of paperwork perfectly from scratch in a fifteen-week semester. This approach allows the student to assess the strengths and weaknesses of readily available examples, which in turn will teach students to critically consider the paperwork itself. Instead of only assessing the student's work for perfectionism, professors can use a combination of evaluation techniques including peer and self-evaluation. A critical approach to what is being taught, why it is being taught and how learning is evaluated will demystify the training process and allow stage management professors to reassess the objectives of their course.

Most importantly, stage management curriculum needs to reevaluate itself from an anti-racist perspective.⁴² Theatrical departments need to examine current practices and policies, such as the 10/12 rehearsal schedules, six-day work week, and crunched rehearsal and development time for how they reinforce white supremacy.⁴³ This should also include revising the ways the field considers and evaluates professionalization in the classroom, rehearsal and in the interview process. The authors of “Hold Please” note, “Artists at these intersections must assimilate to professionalism standards of how to talk, dress, and carry themselves, turning on their ‘stage management voice’ and toning down their Black, feminine, and queer mannerisms to be listened to and respected by their colleagues.”⁴⁴ The authors continue, “If white stage managers act from a belief that they’re just stating facts and following rules, they are ignoring the places prejudice is influencing their work and miss the opportunity to bring in new viewpoints. Stage managers must question where their standards of professionalism are rooted and who they serve, and we must make space for forms of management and expression that are outside of our own.”⁴⁵ This should include critically analyzing how stage management departments evaluate program applicants. In addition, stage management training programs need to expand how they approach and promote mentorships to expand the pipeline on both sides. Meaning, the entry point to the pipeline should not be limited to recent graduates, just as the goal of the pipeline should not be limited to professional Broadway stage management contracts.

Programs also need to evaluate the expected expenditures of stage management students. Professors need to interrupt the currently held and promoted idea that stage managers need to

⁴² For more information on anti-racist practices for stage managers, see Appendix C: Narda E. Alcorn & Lisa Porter’s HowlRound essay: “We commit to Anti-Racist Stage Management Education,” Howlround, created July 28, 2020, <https://howlround.com/we-commit-anti-racist-stage-management-education>.

⁴³ “We See You White American Theatre,” created June 8, 2020, <https://www.weseeyouwat.com/demands>, 5.

⁴⁴ Flores.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

supply the rehearsal room with a standard set of supplies. This hurts financially vulnerable students, who will see this requirement as another obstacle. Programs should also consider the amount of printed paperwork required for course work and move to digital submissions to allow students without access to free printing the opportunity to be judged on the same merits as students that have such access. This is especially the case for stage management promptbook final projects which traditionally ask a student to create a promptbook which includes photocopying a script, printing blocking pages and numerous paperwork examples, and purchasing an expensive binder and organizational tabs. To alleviate student expenses, departments could set aside funding for such course work or allow student stage managers to work on and submit promptbooks from department shows. The department should also consider how the printing needs of their department shows are covered, especially in student driven productions and those deemed “second” stage, which may not have the same department support as the “mainstage” performances.

The field must mandate anti-racist training at the collegiate level to prepare stage managers to act as allies in the rehearsal room.⁴⁶ Amanda Spooner notes, “When stage managers go back [after COVID], and their role is as a middle manager, you can pretend that because you’re not legally a supervisor, you can wash your hands of it. But you’re lying to yourself, because you’re clearly an authority in the room. You’re clearly functioning as someone who is guiding a project and guiding priorities and keeping clear goals.”⁴⁷ This idea is supported by Narda Alcorn, chair of Yale School of Drama’s stage management training program, as depicted by Jerald Raymond Pierce in “Managing the Stage, and Managing Expectations,”

⁴⁶ WSYWAT.

⁴⁷ Pierce, “Managing the Stage...”

“I think [stage managers] are uniquely situated to promote anti-racism in a rehearsal room and in a production process because we’re on the ground every day and we have meaningful contact with just about everybody in the process.” The stage management position, she explained, is steeped in the same white supremacy culture as that of any manager or supervisor in the country. Throughout her career she’s seen too many stage managers who see their role as that of an enforcer, someone whose job is to make sure people don’t break the rules.⁴⁸

Stage managers need to begin this all-important work at the beginning of their training, rather than waiting and hoping that each stage manager will undertake the task of anti-racism once they reach the professional level.⁴⁹ This work should include a “streamlined and transparent process for the proper documentation of issues/concerns brought to the attention of stage management... including a timeline and transparent communication.”⁵⁰ The field must incorporate anti-racist policies, such as enabling cross-cultural competencies, developing “intervention and disruption protocols,” eliminating 10/12 rehearsal schedules, into the undergraduate program and instill student stage managers with the confidence to stand up in the face of harassment and racism.⁵¹

Some stage management students are unprepared for the politics of the field and ill-equipped to balance the personalities, often leading to difficult situations. “After all, a stage manager is generally regarded as in something of a position of authority, but they don’t have hiring or firing power. Often a stage manager may find themselves uniquely sandwiched between the hard skill requirement of knowing and enforcing the rules, and the inherent need to not step

⁴⁸ Pierce, “Managing the Stage...”

⁴⁹ Alcorn.

⁵⁰ WSYWAT, pg 22.

⁵¹ Ibid.

on toes or burn bridges.”⁵² Stage managers must undertake the professionalization process to establish protections for these future stage managers by reimagining stage management training in a post #metoo and Black Lives Matter environment. Lastly, stage management training programs must focus their recruitment on BIPOC student stage managers to ensure that the future of stage management is multicultural.

There are many incongruities between how stage managers are trained compared to the professional realities that stage managers face. Before such discrepancies can be addressed, the field must establish a definition of stage management including details of the stage manager’s responsibilities. Once the field has established a specific definition for stage management, collegiate training programs will need to revisit their teaching curriculum and adjust it to better align with the official definition. Wilensky maintains that the field’s first teachers must link the knowledge base to the practice of the field and assist in creating the rationale for exclusive jurisdiction. He notes, “Where professionalization has gone farthest, the occupational association does not typically set up a training school; the schools usually promote an effective professional association.”⁵³ The field needs to invest in the development of standard terms of study, academic degrees and research programs. Once standard training has been established, stage managers can promote and turn their attention to the professional association to adopt and promote the definition and needs of the field.

DECIDING ON A PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION

In October 2020, over 100 years since the motion that solidified stage management’s relationship with the actors’ union, AEA actors took to social media to bemoan stage

⁵² Pierce, “Managing the Stage...”

⁵³ Wilensky, 144.

management union members. These actors suggested that stage managers leave the actors union in hopes of greener pastures either by joining a pre-existing theatrical union like International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) or the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society (SDC) or by forming their own.⁵⁴ These actors are ill-informed by the history that connects the two fields and are ready to jump ship in hopes of a merger with SAG-AFTRA. A merger would be beneficial to actors who want to participate in theatre, film and TV, streamlining the joining process and allowing them to pay one set of dues rather than two. However, a merger will not aid the stage management cause. If the stage management community feels isolated and lost in AEA's 51,000 person membership, their marginal voice would be even less proportional in an AEA-SAG-AFTRA union, with an additional 160,000 SAG-AFTRA members.⁵⁵ As a result of this newly resurrected conversation, stage managers must confront this debate and decide which professional organization will best represent their voices and needs at the negotiating table.

While an AEA/SAG-AFTRA merger is not currently on the table, there is no guarantee that it will never be on the table. In some ways, that merger will be helpful to the theatrical professionals – a larger membership means a larger collection of due money, more solidarity, and a greater chance of getting negotiations to favor the union. However, if stage management needs are barely recognized by AEA, then stage managers will absolutely be ignored in a merged union with triple the membership. In Fall 2020, AEA and SAG-AFTRA had a jurisdictional

⁵⁴ Karen Olivo, Twitter Post, March 29 2021, 3:44 p.m, <https://twitter.com/Karenolivo/status/1376636389530419203> references the “Unofficial AEA/SAG-AFTRA Merger Discussion” for AEA members on the app Clubhouse: “Unofficial AEA/SAG-AFTRA Merger Discussion,” Clubhouse Events, <https://www.joinclubhouse.com/event/Pr4bNqZ5>; Sam Houkam “The Year of the Stage Manager and a Union Divided,” Technicians for Change, created April 2021, <https://techniciansforchange.org/2021/03/31/the-year-of-the-stage-manager-and-a-union-divided/>.

⁵⁵ AEA, “Diversity Report,” 2; “About,” SAG-AFTRA, accessed December 12, 2020, <https://www.sagaftra.org/about>.

dispute over virtual theatre contracts caused by the pandemic. After being questioned by the press, SAG-AFTRA leadership told the *New York Times* that, “SAG-AFTRA doesn’t represent stage managers, and that if Equity is concerned it could still represent them.”⁵⁶ This comment demonstrates SAG-AFTRA’s obliviousness on the role of the stage manager in U.S. theatre. The waiver SAG-AFTRA proposed in October 2020 spoke nothing on how they would handle stage management positions that are currently required on every AEA contract.⁵⁷ This lack of care does not bode well for the future of stage management should a merger between SAG-AFTRA and AEA take place.

With the increase in and advantages of transmedia performance, stage managers should heed the warning that a merger may be an eventual possibility. This means the field must dedicate time and resources to building stage management recognition and clout within the union. Stage managers must emphasize, with evidence, the critical role the field plays in U.S. theatre and demonstrate the vital relationship between AEA actors and stage managers. “‘If you think of a show as starting from the first rehearsal and finishing on closing night,’ said Mont (who also acknowledged that the development process on some productions can begin years before that first rehearsal), ‘there are really only two groups of people who are there and present from day one to day last: the actors and the stage managers. Crew isn’t there during rehearsals, directors leave after you open. People are in and out and part of different parts of the process. Actors and stage managers are there from the first day of rehearsal and closing night together.’”⁵⁸ Stage management is embedded into AEA’s framework, and although there is a long history of

⁵⁶ Michael Paulson, “There’s Not Much Work for Actors. Now Their Unions are Fighting,” *The New York Times*, October 7, 2020, LexisNexis Academic.

⁵⁷ SAG-AFTRA, “Draft Proposed Waiver Between SAG-AFTRA and AEA,” SAG-AFTRA, accessed October 7, 2020, https://www.sagaftra.org/files/sa_documents/DraftProposedWaiverBetweenSAG-AFTRAEquity.pdf.

⁵⁸ Pierce, “Managing the Stage...”

inattention to stage management needs, the professionalization process may assist in correcting and repairing stage management's relationship with AEA leadership.

As a precaution, stage management community should form an exploratory committee, either independently or through the SMA to consider whether the stage management community would be better served by the SDC or IATSE. At first glance, it makes sense to join with SDC because film/tv stage managers are unionized with the film/TV directors. And, to the contemporary eye, it is a bit surprising that when the directors and choreographers left AEA in 1959 to form their own union, the stage managers did not join them. After all, stage managers worked and continue to work closely with directors and choreographers to maintain their vision after opening. However, when one considers the extent to which the stage managers had built roots within the actors' union, the solidarity with AEA is understandable. By the founding of the SDC, the regulations pertaining to the stage manager's role had been embedded into the AEA rulebook, agreement and contracts that followed.

In addition, any such merger between stage managers and SDC would require extensive negotiation. The contemporary SDC LORT contract focuses on rules pursuant with artistic rights, housing, and financial remuneration.⁵⁹ This would be problematic should stage managers join SDC because stage managers are in great need of specific work/life boundaries including concrete start and end of day times, sick day policies, and other protocols that are currently included in AEA's contracts. Joining IATSE would result in the same extensive negotiation, perhaps more so, since IATSE members often join later in the production process. In the end,

⁵⁹ "The League of Resident Theatres and the Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, Inc. Collective Bargaining Agreement," Stage Directors and Choreographers Society, Inc., April 15, 2017, <https://sdcweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/2017-2022-LORT-SDC-Agreement.pdf>.

merging with either entity would require heavy work for both the stage management community and the potentially joined union.

The final debate revolves around whether or not stage managers should create their own union. This would be perhaps most challenging of all as the stage management community is not a large one. Solidarity and the power of many voices is the secret to an effective national labor union. And while AEA has yet to release any data on the number of self-identified stage managers, the 2019 Stage Managers' Survey reported that 1,904 AEA and non-AEA stage managers consented to participate in the study and poses the hypothetical estimation of 8,000-10,000 U.S. union and non-union stage managers.⁶⁰ A stage management union would struggle to gain the confidences of 8,000-10,000 potential members and may face challenges when convincing producers to accept a newly minted stage management contract. In addition, the SMA's scope is significantly larger than that of AEA. The SMA aspires to represent all stage managers in theatre, opera, dance, television/film, and industrial events. Some stage managers resist joining due to concerns of representation and lack of concrete benefits. Just as AEA struggled to effect change as a professional organization between 1912-1919, the SMA currently does not have the currency to demonstrate its' perceived benefits. Until it does, the SMA will continue to struggle to make a difference on behalf of its members.

The stage management community must consider the goals and ramifications of all four actions: staying in AEA, trading AEA's jurisdiction for SDC or IATSE, or attempting to establish a stage management labor union. Stage managers must also question their place within the actors' union and decide which option will best serve the field's underrepresented voices and which option will best assist the field in its' anti-racist goals to ensure an inclusive and equitable

⁶⁰ McGraw, "Survey," 5.

future. Stage management must break the mold that currently holds them and as Amanda Spooner said, the field must move past the “we have always done it this way” to truly analyze why stage managers are continuing to promote outdated customs.⁶¹

CREATING BASIC QUALIFICATION STANDARDS

Qualification standards for all stage management contracts would ensure that stage management contracts were going to individuals with training and experience and would create another obstacle for producers aiming to circumvent the stage management requirement by putting staff members on contract to save money. Similar to the ways that lengthy and expensive educational training programs benefit white students, these qualifications must incorporate anti-racist values. In addition to promoting financial aid or scholarships focused on BIPOC stage managers, these qualifications can and should reflect the myriad of ways that stage managers learn and train for the job. This should include gap training opportunities and alternative methods of demonstrating competences.⁶²

Instead of requiring all future stage managers to attend a four-year stage management BFA program, I encourage the field to consider alternative means of demonstrating knowledge and experience. Stage management can create a multi-pronged approach, allowing its community to demonstrate skills and proficiencies through established educational opportunities such as collegiate programs or workshops, like those created and promoted by fight and intimacy direction. Likewise, interested parties could validate experience through a portfolio review similar to the one instituted at the United Scenic Artist (U.S.A.) union, which requires potential members to pass a portfolio review before they can join and accept U.S.A. design contracts.

⁶¹ Pierce, “Managing the Stage...”

⁶² WSYWAT.

Additionally, the union can create its own training program similar to the one run by the D.G.A for its stage managers and directors interested in working in film/television. A competency test, similar to that of nursing, medicine or law could also serve as a way to ascertain aptitude, although the field may have issues with developing a test that does not inherently benefit white test takers.

Another avenue for stage management to explore would be continuing education workshops and/or trainings, similar to those currently being offered by a variety of organizations. Continuing education credits are often built into semi-professionalized fields such as nursing, education, and social work. These courses offer refreshers on previously covered topics or break-throughs in current research in their respective fields. Building continuing education into the field will allow stage managers to learn new best practices, ways of doing things and provide a support system. Continuing education workshops would also aid stage managers who have temporarily left the field and are looking to return. Returning workshops could bridge knowledge gaps caused by the stage manager's absence and highlight how the field has developed in recent years. This training could be off-set with "return-ship" mentoring opportunities, which would connect returning stage managers with working stage managers. In other words, the field should consider expanding mentoring opportunities to include stage managers of all ages and experience levels which would promote community and support systems for all stage managers.

Through these qualification methods, the field can create pipelines of success with various access points and with the ability to bridge expensive training programs with a career in stage management. One such option could include "future-ships," wherein middle or high school students engage with college or professional stage managers to advertise stage management career options to those with little theatrical experience. Even if these students do

not stay within the theatrical stage management field, the experiences generated through such programs could inspire student stage managers to pursue other stage-management like careers such as wedding planning, event organizing, etc.

Implementing basic qualifications and continuing education training will aid the field in establishing exclusive competence and will assist in instituting legal protections of the title or definition, making it impossible for a producer to hire a “technical advisor” who performs stage management tasks without the benefit of a union contract. Through qualifications and stage management focused contracts the field can establish rules similar to IATSE’s wherein only a union props member can pick up a chair and move it. While silly, it does protect those jobs from encroachment. This legal regulation of the field would simultaneously protect the stage management field, but also enhances its status and protects the production process and all its laborers. It would ensure that the person at the helm of the production is aware of their duties and responsibilities as stage manager.

CONCLUSION

In the 1940s stage managers created an educational program to explain the stage manager’s role in American theatre and offer ongoing training opportunities to New York stage managers to improve their skills. This program parallels the mission for the 2020/2021: Year of the Stage Manager grassroots campaign. The field fervently wants to be recognized for its work and to build a community of professionals who can improve practices. Though stage managers debate how they want to be recognized, one way to ensure that recognition occurs is through the professionalization process.

The stage management field must face and participate in these four discussions before the field can begin to reconstruct a more equitable field. The process of professionalization can be adapted and reformed to make it more equitable and through this process, stage managers can obtain the respect and consideration long overdue for a field that dates back eight hundred years to the fourteenth century. Professionalization will also aid stage managers at the bargaining table, where working conditions and protections are negotiated. Until the theatre profession is forced to acknowledge the field's long-standing history in U.S. theatre and its undeniable influence on the production process, stage management requests will continue to be diminished or taken off the table. It is not enough to have a select few advocates, the field must come together to demonstrate stage management's significance in theatre.

While some of the suggestions in this dissertation are perhaps not politically or financially possible at this time, stage managers should not be shoved to the wayside. In addition, even though the field represents a marginal portion of AEA's membership, it does not justify ignoring stage management. AEA and the stage management field need to collaborate to identify creative ways to meet each of these needs.

Once each of these issues has been addressed, stage managers can revisit and revise the definition, needs and desires of the field as stage managers move into a new tomorrow, creating regulations to ensure that stage management jobs are going to qualified and scrupulous stage managers. Adding required union assistant stage managers and production assistants to every contract will increase job security and reduce internal competition. Focusing the definition on the service ideal, a commitment to ensure production needs are being met (emotionally, physically, mentally, etc.) will streamline the stage managers labor and reinforce the importance of setting boundaries. Most of all, during the professionalization process, stage managers will generate

data and research on the effect the craft has on the arts, the history of its significance and develop best practices for the field to adapt.

Through acceptance and reflection on past decisions, contemporary AEA leadership must realize that while actors and stage managers have similar historical narratives, they have since grown apart. As such, it is essential that stage management negotiates its professionalization, labor, identity, definition, and contracts differently, and perhaps, separately from actors. Otherwise, as I have discussed, stage management should consider leaving AEA to find a more supportive union. Our goals should be to increase representation, create new access points to the work, improve the employment pipeline, create more work for stage managers, make room and amplify voices, foster community and create spaces for everyone to come together. The field must use this historical research to challenge the contemporary status quo and take this moment to reclaim stage management's long history of organizing and effecting change in the production process.

CONCLUSION

This cautionary tale about stage management's failed quest for professionalization should serve as a warning for frustrated U.S. stage managers everywhere. What was once an aural character in a performance moved to its invisible post at the turn of the century. Stage managers gradually transitioned into silent witnesses to the rehearsal and production process. The field was largely overlooked and often held hostage by AEA union representatives to ensure that stage managers would not realign with the producers or a different union. Stage management's history has been ignored, overlooked and disparaged, but in this recovery, we can learn lessons to bolster our requests for fair treatment and better working conditions.

As a proud AEA member, this dissertation is not meant to condemn contemporary AEA leadership, many of whom are unaware of the damage that their historical counterparts have inflicted on the stage management field. Instead, this dissertation's purpose is to recover stage management's history so that the union and the field can learn from its previous missteps and correct the course. In publishing this dissertation, I hope today's AEA leaders can acknowledge that there is work to be done and support the stage management field as it undertakes another attempt at professionalization.

As demonstrated in this dissertation, stage managers have organized several times in the early twentieth century in an attempt to professionalize the field, garner better working conditions and ultimately prove their essential roles in American theater-making. The 1942 memo signed by 45 New York stage managers resulted in backlash reaffirming AEA's impression that stage managers were actors with extra duties, undeserving of any special treatment. By 1947, the working group of stage managers grew to 127 and after its almost

complete failure, spurred the group into creating their own professional Stage Managers' Association. The first SMA was created to assist AEA in negotiating stage management terms of employment. Almost immediately, AEA forced the organization to dissolve in exchange for the meager offer of an economic stage management committee. However, stage management economic requests continued to be passed over by the AEA Executive committee in the mid-twentieth century.

This dissertation's scope focused on the early part of the twentieth century to assess the ways that the field of stage management attempted to professionalize and analyze the obstacles that prevented their success. After the 1948 dissolution of the first SMA, stage managers did not give up, but continued to organize within the constraints of the union, eventually reforming a second Stage Managers' Association, outside of AEA's purview in 1981. Tired of being undervalued and overlooked by AEA, the second SMA set out to replace AEA with a stage managers' union. Though unsuccessful in its unionization, the second SMA continues to be a professional resource for all stage managers, regardless of performative genre.

Eighty years later, many of the demands initially made in 1942 are still being petitioned by contemporary stage managers and the grassroots campaign: 2020/2021: Year of the Stage Manager. These include qualifications for stage managers, rider or contract specific to stage management working conditions and needs, mandatory AEA stage managers and assistants, and eliminating the use of stage managers' and assistants as understudies on all AEA productions. The contemporary movement aims to educate theatrical professionals on the role of the stage manager, but the field sorely needs to formalize its definition of the field. Until a definition is legitimately in place, the field is unable to draw on its boundaries for jurisdictional disputes or exclusive knowledge. Once a definition is created, the process of professionalization can

continue as stage managers refine what is being taught and create specific qualification guidelines which should be met prior to signing an AEA contract.

The stage management field is already in peril because of stage management's inaction to rectify AEA's misgivings about the field. Stage management continues to refrain from defining itself, its jurisdiction and its position within U.S. theatre practice, leaving it vulnerable to being overlooked and undermined at the negotiating table. May this cautionary tale on stage management's failure to professionalize serve as a reminder to contemporary stage managers about the danger in doing nothing and accepting the perceived status quo.

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APPENDIX A: LIST OF STAGE MANAGEMENT HANDBOOKS, 1870-1980

BASED ON U.S. STAGE MANAGEMENT

<u>#</u>	<u>YEAR PUBLISHED</u>	<u>TITLE OF HANDBOOK</u>	<u>AUTHOR</u>	<u>PUBLISHER</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>
1	1870	The Guide To The Stage, Or, How To Enter The Theatrical Profession, Obtain An Engagement, And Become An Actor	Rede, Leman Thomas, 1799-1832	Samuel French	London/ New York
2	1872	How We Managed Our Private Theatricals	F. C. Burnand	Happy Hours Company	New York
3	1899	How To Become An Actor	Buchanan, R. C.	Samuel French	London ¹
4	1900	How To Become An Actor, Giving Complete Instructions As To The Duties Of Stage Manager, Prompter, Scenic Artist, Property Man	Aaron A. Warford	F. Tousey	New York
5	1904	Amateur Theatricals: A Practical Guide	C. Lang Neil	C.A. Pearson	London ²
6	1907	"The Art Of The Stage-Manager" In <i>Inquiries And Opinions</i>	Brander Matthews	Charles Scribner's Sons	New York
7	1916	Practical Stage Directing For Amateurs; A Handbook For Amateur Managers And Actors	Emerson Gifford Taylor	E. P. Dutton and Co.	New York
8	1916	Training For The Stage: Some Hints For Those About To Choose The Player's Career	Arthur Hornblow	J. B. Lippincott Co.	Philadelphia
9	1916	Play Productions In America	Arthur Edwin Krows	Henry Holt and Company	New York
10	1928	The Art Of Play Production	John Dolman, Jr.	Harper & Brothers	New York
11	1930	Runnin' The Show: A Practical Handbook	Richard Whorf, Roger Wheeler	Walter H. Baker Co	Boston
12	1934	Scenery Simplified: A Director's Digest Of Scenery And Stage Management	Glenn R Webster William Wetzel	Eldridge Entertainment House, Inc.	Denver
13	1936	Stage Management	Peter Bax	L. Dickson	London ³
14	1937	Stage Management For Amateur Theatre	William Perdue Halstead	F.S. Crofts & Co.	New York
15	1937	A Stage Manager's Manual	Edward Cyrus Cole, Yale University	Manuscript	Yale University
16	1937	A Manual Of Play Production By A. M. Drummond	Drummond, A. M.	Cornell Co-operative Society	New York
17	1939	Proscenium And Sight-Lines: A Complete System Of Scenery Planning And A Guide To The Laying Out Of Stages For Scene-Designers, Stage-Managers, Theatre Architects And Engineers, Theatrical History And Research Workers And Those Concerned With The Planning Of Stages For Small Halls	Southern, Richard.	Theatre Arts books	New York
18	1942	Designing The Play: A Workbook For Dramatic Production	Charles W. Cooper Paul A. Camp	Appleton Century Crofts	New York
19	1946	The Stagemaster System	The Stagemaster System	Wm. N. Cann, Inc.	Delaware
20	1952	The Stage Manager's Handbook	Bert Gruver	DBS Publishers	New York
21	1974	Stage Management: A Guidebook Of Practical Techniques	Lawrence Stern	Allyn and Bacon	Boston

¹ This manual was published prior to the major developments that divided British and U.S. stage management.

² This manual was published prior to the major developments that divided British and U.S. stage management.

³ This manual was published after the major developments, however, many of the U.S. stage management handbooks referenced this text in their bibliography making it historically relevant to my research.

BASED ON BRITISH STAGE MANAGEMENT

<u>#</u>	<u>Year Published</u>	<u>TITLE OF HANDBOOK</u>	<u>AUTHOR</u>	<u>PUBLISHER</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>
1	1870	The Guide To The Stage, Or, How To Enter The Theatrical Profession, Obtain An Engagement, And Become An Actor Founded On And Partly Taken From Leman Rede's Book	Rede, Leman Thomas, 1799-1832	Samuel French	London/ New York ⁴
2	1899	How To Become An Actor	Buchanan, R. C.	Samuel French	London ⁵
3	1904	Amateur Theatricals: A Practical Guide	C. Lang Neil	C.A. Pearson	London ⁶
4	1921	ABC Of Production: A Hand-Book Of Stage-Management For Amateurs	Rupert M. Heath	Samuel French	London
5	1927	Play Production And Stage Management For Amateurs	Leslie H. Gordon	Mills & Boon	London
6	1930	Producing Plays; A Handbook For Producers And Players By C. B. Purdom	Purdom, C. B. 1883-1965.	J. M. Dent	London
7	1931	Amateur Stage Management And Production	Charles S. Parsons	Pitman & Sons Ltd.	London
8	1936	Stage Management	Peter Bax	L. Dickson	London ⁷
9	1953	The Art And Science Of Stage Management	Peter Goffin	Miller	London
10	1957	Stage Management	Hal D. Stewart	Pitman & Sons Ltd.	London
11	1959	Modern Theatre Practice: A Handbook Of Play Production	Hubert C. Heffner	Appleton Century Crofts	New York
12	1968	Stage Management And Theatre Craft: A Stage Manager's Handbook	Hendrik Baker	Theatre Arts books	New York
13	1963	Stage Management In The Amateur Theatre Foreword By Stephen C. Venner	Melvill, Harald.	Barrie and Rockliff	London

⁴ This manual also appears on the list of U.S. Handbooks.

⁵ This manual also appears on the list of U.S. Handbooks.

⁶ This manual also appears on the list of U.S. Handbooks.

⁷ This manual also appears on the list of U.S. Handbooks.

APPENDIX B: STAGE MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK SPREADSHEETS

Frequency And Use Of Key Titles, U.S. Handbooks, 1870-1980

#	Year	Book Title	Author	Use of term "SM" as "Director"	SM as Director Frequency	Use of term "DIRECTOR"	Director Frequency	Use of term "SM" as "Tech Director"	SM as Tech Frequency	Use of term "SM" as "PSM"	SM as PSM Frequency	Use of term "Prompter" as "SM"	Prompter as SM Frequency	Use of term "Prompter" as "ASM"	Prompter as ASM Frequency	Use of term "ASM"	ASM Frequency	Use of term "Call Boy"	Call Boy Frequency	Tech Director	Tech Director Frequency
1	1870	The Guide to the Stage	Rede, Leman Thomas	YES	8	N	0	N	0	N	0	YES	31	N	0	N	0	YES	7	N	0
2	1872	How We Managed Our Private Theatricals	F. C. Burnand	YES	3	N	0	N	0	N	0	YES	2	N	0	N	0	N	0	N	0
3	1899	How to Become an Actor	R. C. Buchanan	YES	5	N	0	N	0	N	0	YES	1	N	0	N	0	YES	2	N	0
4	1900	How to Become an Actor	Aaron A. Warford	YES	3	N	0	YES	50	N	0	YES	4	N	0	N	0	YES	6	N	0
5	1904	Amateur Theatricals: A Practical Guide	C. Lang Neil	YES	46	N	0	YES	1	N	0	YES	33	N	0	N	0	N	0	N	0
6	1907	"The Art of the Stage-Manager" in Inquiries and Opinions	Brander Matthews	YES	52	N	0	YES	1	N	0	N	0	N	0	N	0	N	0	N	0
7	1916	Practical Stage Directing for Amateurs	Emerson Gifford Taylor	YES	43	YES	2	N	0	N	0	YES	6	YES	1	YES	1	YES	1	N	0
8	1916	Training for the Stage	Arthur Hornblow	YES	6	YES	8	N	0	N	0	N	0	N	0	N	0	YES	2	N	0
9	1916	Play Productions in America	Arthur Edwin Krows	N	0	YES	78	YES	5	YES	20	YES	18	YES	1	N	0	YES	4	YES	1
10	1928	The Art of Play Production	John Dolman, Jr.	YES	3	YES	1,000	YES	16	YES	15	YES	19	YES	1	YES	2	YES	7	N	0
11	1930	Runnin' The Show	Richard Whorf, Roger Wheeler	N	0	YES	4	YES	18	N	0	N	0	N	0	N	0	N	0	YES	1
12	1934	Scenery Simplified	Glenn R Webster, William Wetzel	N	0	YES	43	YES	30	YES	5	YES	2	YES	3	YES	11	YES	1	N	0
13	1936	Stage Management	Peter Bax	N	0	YES	5	YES	500	YES	500	N	0	YES	31	YES	58	YES	24	N	0

#	Year	Book Title	Author	Use of term "SM" as "Director"	SM as Director Frequency	Use of term "DIRECTOR"	Director Frequency	Use of term "SM" as "Tech Director"	SM as Tech Frequency	Use of term "SM" as "PSM"	SM as PSM Frequency	Use of term "Prompter" as "SM"	Prompter as SM Frequency	Use of term "Prompter" as "ASM"	Prompter as ASM Frequency	Use of term "ASM"	ASM Frequency	Use of term "Call Boy"	Call Boy Frequency	Tech Director	Tech Director Frequency
14	1937	Stage Management for Amateur Theatre	William Perdue Halstead	N	0	YES	300	0	0	YES	300	N	0	YES	29	YES	25	YES	40	YES	49
15	1937	A Stage Manager's Manual	Edward Cyrus Cole	N	0	YES	24	N	0	YES	91	N	0	YES	20	YES	10	N	0	YES	10
16	1937	A Manual of Play Production	A. M. Drummond	N	0	YES	60	YES	10	N	0	YES	7	N	0	N	0	N	0	N	0
17	1939	Proscenium and Sight-lines	Richard Southern	N	0	N	0	YES	5	YES	10	N	0	N	0	N	0	N	0	N	9
18	1942	Designing the Play: A Workbook for Dramatic Production	Charles W. Cooper, Paul A. Camp	N	0	YES	100	N	0	YES	8	N	0	YES	1	N	0	N	0	YES	1
19	1946	The Stagemaster System	The Stagemaster System	N	0	YES	1	YES	1	YES	1	N	0	N	0	N	0	N	0	N	0
20	1952	The Stage Manager's Handbook	Bert Gruver	N	0	YES	100	N	0	YES	500	N	0	YES	9	YES	4	N	0	YES	1
21	1974	Stage Management: A Guidebook of Practical Techniques	Lawrence Stern	N	0	YES	500	N	0	YES	50	N	0	YES	2	YES	7	YES	2	YES	20

Stage Management Labor In U.S. Handbooks, 1870-1980

#	Year	Book Title	Author	Emotional Labor Tasks	Communication skills	Delegation	Leadership Skills	Discipline	Technical Knowledge	Prompting the Show	Calling the Show	Creates Paperwork	Holds and Marks Promptbook	Acting Expected	Acting Possible	Acting Discouraged	Chooses the Show	Casts the Show	Gives Blocking	Cuts in Script	Design Choices	SM as Woman	SM as Expert	SM as Artist
1	1870	The Guide to the Stage	Rede, Leman Thomas	N	N	N	N	SM	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	SM	SM	SM	N	N	N	SM	N
2	1872	How We Managed Our Private Theatricals	F. C. Burnand	N	N	N	SM	SM	SM	N	N	N	N	N	SM	N	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	N	SM	N
3	1899	How to Become an Actor	R. C. Buchanan	SM	SM	N	SM	SM	N	SM	SM	N	SM	N	SM	N	N	N	SM	N	SM	N	SM	N
4	1900	How to Become an Actor	Aaron A. Warford	N	N	N	N	N	SM	N	N	SM	N	N	N	N	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	N	N	N
5	1904	Amateur Theatricals: A Practical Guide	C. Lang Neil	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	N	SM	N	N	N	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	N	SM	SM
6	1907	"The Art of the Stage-Manager" in Inquiries and Opinions	Brander Matthews	N	N	N	SM	SM	SM	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	N	SM	SM
7	1916	Practical Stage Directing for Amateurs	Emerson Gifford Taylor	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	N	N	SM	N	N	N	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	N	SM	SM
8	1916	Training for the Stage	Arthur Hornblow	N	N	N	N	SM	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	SM	SM	N	N	N	SM	SM
9	1916	Play Productions in America	Arthur Edwin Krows	SM	SM	SM	SM	Y	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	SM
10	1928	The Art of Play Production	John Dolman, Jr.	N	N	SM	SM	SM	SM	N	SM	SM	SM	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	SM	SM
11	1930	Runnin' The Show: A Practical Handbook	Richard Whorf, Roger Wheeler	N	N	N	N	N	SM	N	SM	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	SM	SM
12	1934	Scenery Simplified: A Director's Digest of Scenery and Stage Management	Glenn R Webster, William Wetzel	N	SM	SM	SM	N	SM	N	SM	SM	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	SM	N

#	Year	Book Title	Author	Emotional Labor Tasks	Communication skills	Delegation	Leadership Skills	Discipline	Technical Knowledge	Prompting the Show	Calling the Show	Creates Paperwork	Holds and Marks Promptbook	Acting Expected	Acting Possible	Acting Discouraged	Chooses the Show	Casts the Show	Gives Blocking	Cuts in Script	Design Choices	SM as Woman	SM as Expert	SM as Artist
13	1936	Stage Management	Peter Bax	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	Y	SM	SM	SM	SM	N	SM	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	SM	N
14	1937	Stage Management for Amateur Theatre	William Perdue Halstead	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	N	SM	N	N	N	N	N	N	SM	SM	N
15	1937	A Stage Manager's Manual	Edward Cyrus Cole	N	SM	SM	SM	N	N	SM	SM	SM	SM	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	SM	N
16	1937	A Manual of Play Production	A. M. Drummond	N	N	N	SM	SM	SM	N	N	N	SM	N	SM	N	N	N	SM	N	N	N	SM	N
17	1939	Proscenium and Sight-lines	Richard Southern	N	N	N	N	N	SM	SM	SM	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	SM	N
18	1942	Designing the Play: A Workbook for Dramatic Production	Charles W. Cooper, Paul A. Camp	N	SM	N	N	N	SM	N	SM	SM	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
19	1946	The Stagemaster System	The Stagemaster System	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	SM	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
20	1952	The Stage Manager's Handbook	Bert Gruver	SM	SM	SM	SM	SM	N	SM	SM	SM	SM	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	SM	N	N
21	1974	Stage Management: A Guidebook of Practical Techniques	Lawrence Stern	SM	SM	SM	SM	N	N	SM	SM	SM	SM	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	SM	N

Prompter's Labor In U.S. Handbooks, 1870-1980

#	Year	Book Title	Author	Emotional Labor Tasks	Communication skills	Delegation	Leadership Skills	Discipline	Technical Knowledge	Prompting the Show	Calling the Show	Paperwork Examples	Holds and Marks Promptbook	Acting Expected	Acting Possible	Acting Discouraged	Chooses the Show	Casts the Show	Gives Blocking	Cuts in Script	Design Choices	Prompter as Woman	Prompter as Expert	Prompter as Artist
1	1870	The Guide to the Stage	Rede, Leman Thomas	N	PR	PR	N	PR	N	PR	PR	N	PR	N	N	N	N	N	PR	N	N	N	PR	N
2	1872	How We Managed Our Private Theatricals	F. C. Burnand	N	N	N	N	N	N	PR	PR	N	PR	N	PR	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
3	1899	How to Become an Actor	R. C. Buchanan	N	PR	N	N	PR	N	PR	PR	N	PR	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
4	1900	How to Become an Actor	Aaron A. Warford	N	PR	PR	N	N	N	PR	PR	PR	PR	N	N	N	N	N	PR	N	N	N	N	N
5	1904	Amateur Theatricals: A Practical Guide	C. Lang Neil	PR	PR	PR	PR	N	PR	PR	PR	PR	PR	N	N	N	N	N	PR	N	N	N	N	N
6	1907	"The Art of the Stage-Manager" in Inquiries and Opinions	Brander Matthews	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
7	1916	Practical Stage Directing for Amateurs	Emerson Gifford Taylor	N	N	N	N	N	N	PR	PR	PR	PR	N	N	PR	N	N	N	N	N	N	PR	PR
8	1916	Training for the Stage	Arthur Hornblow	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
9	1916	Play Productions in America	Arthur Edwin Krows	N	N	N	N	N	N	PR	PR	PR	PR	N	PR	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
10	1928	The Art of Play Production	John Dolman, Jr.	PR	N	PR	N	N	N	PR	PR	PR	PR	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	PR	PR
11	1930	Runnin' The Show: A Practical Handbook	Richard Whorf, Roger Wheeler	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
12	1934	Scenery Simplified: A Director's Digest of Scenery and Stage Management	Glenn R Webster, William Wetzel	PR	N	N	N	N	N	PR	PR	PR	PR	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	PR	N	N

#	Year	Book Title	Author	Emotional Labor Tasks	Communication skills	Delegation	Leadership Skills	Discipline	Technical Knowledge	Prompting the Show	Calling the Show	Paperwork Examples	Holds and Marks Promptbook	Acting Expected	Acting Possible	Acting Discouraged	Chooses the Show	Casts the Show	Gives Blocking	Cuts in Script	Design Choices	Prompter as Woman	Prompter as Expert	Prompter as Artist
13	1936	Stage Management	Peter Bax	PR	PR	N	N	N	N	PR	PR	PR	PR	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	PR	PR	N
14	1937	Stage Management for Amateur Theatre	William Perdue Halstead	PR	PR	PR	PR	N	N	PR	PR	PR	PR	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	PR	PR	PR
15	1937	A Stage Manager's Manual	Edward Cyrus Cole	N	N	N	N	N	N	PR	PR	PR	PR	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
16	1937	A Manual of Play Production	A. M. Drummond	N	N	N	PR	N	N	PR	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
17	1939	Proscenium and Sight-lines	Richard Southern	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
18	1942	Designing the Play: A Workbook for Dramatic Production	Charles W. Cooper, Paul A. Camp	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
19	1946	The Stagemaster System	The Stagemaster System	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
20	1952	The Stage Manager's Handbook	Bert Gruver	PR	PR	N	N	N	N	PR	N	N	PR	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
21	1974	Stage Management: A Guidebook of Practical Techniques	Lawrence Stern	N	N	N	N	N	N	PR	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N

ASM's Labor In U.S. Handbooks, 1870-1980

#	Year	Book Title	Author	Emotional Labor Tasks	Communication skills	Delegation	Leadership Skills	Discipline	Technical Knowledge	Prompting the Show	Calling the Show	Paperwork Examples	Holds and Marks Promptbook	Acting Expected	Acting Possible	Acting Discouraged	ASM as Woman	ASM as Expert	ASM as Artist
1	1870	The Guide to the Stage	Rede, Leman Thomas	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
2	1872	How We Managed Our Private Theatricals	F. C. Burnand	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
3	1899	How to Become an Actor	R. C. Buchanan	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
4	1900	How to Become an Actor	Aaron A. Warford	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
5	1904	Amateur Theatricals: A Practical Guide	C. Lang Neil	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
6	1907	"The Art of the Stage-Manager" in Inquiries and Opinions	Brander Matthews	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
7	1916	Practical Stage Directing for Amateurs	Emerson Gifford Taylor	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
8	1916	Training for the Stage	Arthur Hornblow	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
9	1916	Play Productions in America	Arthur Edwin Krows	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
10	1928	The Art of Play Production	John Dolman, Jr.	N	N	AS M	AS M	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
11	1930	Runnin' The Show: A Practical Handbook	Richard Whorf, Roger Wheeler	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
12	1934	Scenery Simplified: A Director's Digest of Scenery and Stage Management	Glenn R Webster, William Wetzel	AS M	AS M	N	N	N	N	AS M	AS M	AS M	ASM	N	N	N	AS M	N	N
13	1936	Stage Management	Peter Bax	AS M	AS M	AS M	AS M	AS M	N	AS M	AS M	AS M	ASM	N	AS M	N	N	AS M	N
14	1937	Stage Management for Amateur Theatre	William Perdue Halstead	AS M	AS M	AS M	AS M	N	AS M	AS M	AS M	AS M	ASM	N	N	N	AS M	AS M	N

#	Year	Book Title	Author	Emotional Labor Tasks	Communication skills	Delegation	Leadership Skills	Discipline	Technical Knowledge	Prompting the Show	Calling the Show	Paperwork Examples	Holds and Marks Promptbook	Acting Expected	Acting Possible	Acting Discouraged	ASM as Woman	ASM as Expert	ASM as Artist
15	1937	A Stage Manager's Manual	Edward Cyrus Cole	N	AS M	N	N	N	N	AS M	AS M	AS M	ASM	N	N	N	N	N	N
16	1937	A Manual of Play Production	A. M. Drummond	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
17	1939	Proscenium and Sight-lines	Richard Southern	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
18	1942	Designing the Play: A Workbook for Dramatic Production	Charles W. Cooper, Paul A. Camp	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	AS M	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
19	1946	The Stagemaster System	The Stagemaster System	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
20	1952	The Stage Manager's Handbook	Bert Gruver	AS M	AS M	AS M	AS M	AS M	N	AS M	AS M	AS M	N	N	N	N	AS M	N	N
21	1974	Stage Management: A Guidebook of Practical Techniques	Lawrence Stern	AS M	AS M	AS M	AS M	N	N	AS M	N	AS M	N	N	AS M	N	AS M	N	N

Director's Labor In U.S. Handbooks, 1870-1980

#	Year	Book Title	Author	Chooses the Show	Casts the Show	Gives Blocking	Cuts in Script	Design Choices	Leaves after Opening
1	1870	The Guide to the Stage	Rede, Leman Thomas	N	N	N	N	N	N
2	1872	How We Managed Our Private Theatricals	F. C. Burnand	N	N	N	N	N	N
3	1899	How to Become an Actor	R. C. Buchanan	N	N	N	N	N	N
4	1900	How to Become an Actor	Aaron A. Warford	N	N	N	N	N	N
5	1904	Amateur Theatricals: A Practical Guide	C. Lang Neil	N	N	N	N	N	N
6	1907	"The Art of the Stage-Manager" in Inquiries and Opinions	Brander Matthews	N	N	N	N	N	N
7	1916	Practical Stage Directing for Amateurs	Emerson Gifford Taylor	N	N	DIR	N	N	N
8	1916	Training for the Stage	Arthur Hornblow	N	DIR	DIR	N	N	N
9	1916	Play Productions in America	Arthur Edwin Krows	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR
10	1928	The Art of Play Production	John Dolman, Jr.	N	DIR	DIR	DIR	N	DIR
11	1930	Runnin' The Show: A Practical Handbook	Richard Whorf, Roger Wheeler	N	N	N	N	DIR	N
12	1934	Scenery Simplified: A Director's Digest of Scenery and Stage Management	Glenn R Webster, William Wetzel	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR
13	1936	Stage Management	Peter Bax	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR	N	N
14	1937	Stage Management for Amateur Theatre	William Perdue Halstead	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR
15	1937	A Stage Manager's Manual	Edward Cyrus Cole	N	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR

#	Year	Book Title	Author	Chooses the Show	Casts the Show	Gives Blocking	Cuts in Script	Design Choices	Leaves after Opening
16	1937	A Manual of Play Production	A. M. Drummond	DIR	DIR	DIR	N	DIR	DIR
17	1939	Proscenium and Sight-lines	Richard Southern	N	N	N	N	N	N
18	1942	Designing the Play: A Workbook for Dramatic Production	Charles W. Cooper, Paul A. Camp	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR	N
19	1946	The Stagemaster System	The Stagemaster System	N	N	DIR	DIR	N	N
20	1952	The Stage Manager's Handbook	Bert Gruver	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR
21	1974	Stage Management: A Guidebook of Practical Techniques	Lawrence Stern	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR	DIR

Calling Technology In U.S. Handbooks, 1870-1980

#	Year	Book Title	Author	Prompt Side/ Opposite Prompt	Stage Left / Stage Right	VERBAL	CALL BOYES	BELLS	WHISTLES	GESTURES	FLAGS	SPEAKING TUBE	CUE LIGHTS	TELEPHONE	SOUND SYSESTEM	INTERCOM
1	1870	The Guide to the Stage	Rede, Leman Thomas	N	N	N	YES	YES	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
2	1872	How We Managed Our Private Theatricals	F. C. Burnand	N	N	N	N	YES	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
3	1899	How to Become an Actor	R. C. Buchanan	YES	N	N	N	YES	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
4	1900	How to Become an Actor	Aaron A. Warford	N	YES	N	YES	YES	YES	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
5	1904	Amateur Theatricals: A Practical Guide	C. Lang Neil	N	N	N	N	YES	N	YES	N	N	N	N	N	N
6	1907	"The Art of the Stage-Manager" in Inquiries and Opinions	Brander Matthews	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
7	1916	Practical Stage Directing for Amateurs	Emerson Gifford Taylor	N	N	YES	YES	YES	N	N	N	N	YES	N	N	N
8	1916	Training for the Stage	Arthur Hornblow	N	N	N	YES	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
9	1916	Play Productions in America	Arthur Edwin Krows	YES	N	YES	YES	YES	N	N	N	YES	YES	N	N	N
10	1928	The Art of Play Production	John Dolman, Jr.	N	YES	N	YES	YES	N	N	N	N	YES	N	N	N
11	1930	Runnin' The Show: A Practical Handbook	Richard Whorf, Roger Wheeler	N	N	YES	N	N	N	YES	N	N	N	N	N	N
12	1934	Scenery Simplified: A Director's Digest of Scenery and Stage Management	Glenn R Webster, William Wetzel	N	YES	YES	YES	N	N	YES	N	N	YES	N	N	N
13	1936	Stage Management	Peter Bax	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	N	YES	N	YES	YES	YES	N	N
14	1937	Stage Management for Amateur Theatre	William Perdue Halstead	N	YES	YES	YES	YES	N	YES	YES	N	YES	YES	N	N

#	Year	Book Title	Author	Prompt Side/ Opposite Prompt	Stage Left / Stage Right	VERBAL	CALL BOYES	BELLS	WHISTLES	GESTURES	FLAGS	SPEAKING TUBE	CUE LIGHTS	TELEPHONE	SOUND SYSESTEM	INTERCOM
15	1937	A Stage Manager's Manual	Edward Cyrus Cole	N	YES	YES	N	YES	N	YES	N	N	YES	N	N	N
16	1937	A Manual of Play Production	A. M. Drummond	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
17	1939	Proscenium and Sight-lines	Richard Southern	N	YES	YES	N	N	N	YES	N	N	YES	N	N	N
18	1942	Designing the Play: A Workbook for Dramatic Production	Charles W. Cooper, Paul A. Camp	N	YES	YES	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
19	1946	The Stagemaster System	The Stagemaster System	N	YES	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N
20	1952	The Stage Manager's Handbook	Bert Gruver	YES	YES	YES	N	YES	N	YES	N	N	YES	N	YES	YES
21	1974	Stage Management: A Guidebook of Practical Techniques	Lawrence Stern	N	YES	YES	YES	N	N	YES	N	N	N	N	YES	YES

APPENDIX C: WE COMMIT TO ANTI-RACIST

STAGE MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

This piece, “We Commit to Anti-Racist Stage Management Education” by Narda Alcorn and Lisa Porter, was originally published on HowlRound Theatre Commons (<https://howlround.com/we-commit-anti-racist-stage-management-education>), on 28 July 2020 and is reprinted in this dissertation with permission from the authors.

From tragedy to uproar, America is being held to account. There is much work to do during this pause. We are two educators and stage managers who lead the MFA programs at Yale School of Drama and the University of California, San Diego. We identify as women—one Black, and one White—who share an intentional commitment to practicing and teaching anti-racist stage management. We are engaged in inquiry and self-assessment, as well as conversation about how the production of live performance will be transformed and how we can prepare stage managers to lead an authentically equitable theatrical process.

Many in the theatre community have been learning how to be anti-racist collaborators, leading the movement to end the passive tolerance of racism. Stage managers who are fluent in anti-racism persistently dismantle racist production practices by employing techniques like the ones outlined below. This work empowers stage managers to emerge from this lengthy COVID-19 pause prepared to navigate a new production landscape.

We have been in dialogue about race, equity, and the stage manager’s unique role within the production process since we met as graduate students at Yale School of Drama in 1992, but anti-racism was not part of our practice. The events of the spring of 2020 have compelled us to focus on the imperative work of anti-racism and share those practices with our students.

When writing our recently published book, ***Stage Management Theory as a Guide to Practice: Cultivating a Creative Approach***, we compared notes about how our careers have unfolded over the past twenty-five years. Narda’s career as a Black stage manager has been shaped by situations including becoming the diversity expert by default, enduring racist aggression, and being either invisible or tokenized throughout a production process. Lisa, in comparison, as a White stage manager—with the accompanying and implicit privilege—lacks equivalent encounters.

Scholars and activists Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, in their seminal work *Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups*, define white supremacy culture as “the ideology that the ideas, thoughts, beliefs, and actions of white people are superior to People of Color.” Our self-reflection has revealed how we’ve unconsciously and complicity upheld white supremacy culture within the production process. Characteristics like binary thinking, a sense of urgency, and individualism are identified as white supremacist traits and are often embedded in a stage manager’s work. Responsibilities that include tracking time, enforcing rules and policies, and recording and reporting information make the stage manager especially susceptible to upholding systems of oppression.

The tools and practices offered below provide the beginning of a curriculum for anti-racist stage managers.

TOOL: DISMANTLING PERFECTIONISM

Perfectionism manifests from white supremacy culture and asserts that the singular right way to work has been imposed by the White leaders who dominate a field.

Practices

- Stop holding up perfectionism as an essential stage management attribute. Mistakes are part of the process for all collaborators, and stage managers can model apologizing and repairing harm.
- Recognize and redirect working exclusively to attain the approval of systems and people. Aspiring to be likeable can interfere with anti-racist action.
- Understand achievement stereotypes based on race. In particular, consider the myth of Black exceptionalism—that Black people who are educated, smart, well spoken, and put together are the exceptions and atypical from the general Black population.

TOOL: RESEARCH AND SELF-EDUCATION

The stage manager's level of self-education combined with their formal authority has the capacity to influence anti-racist practices in others.

Practices

- Engage in an independent anti-racist curriculum by reading books and taking on the burden of responsibility to be well educated about anti-racist theory and practice.
- Seek out information from sources that have an identity different from your own.
- Educate yourself about diverse perspectives, refraining from relying on the person whose experience you need to understand. When the play has charged racial content or involves multi-racial perspectives, your research and self-education can inform your choices.

TOOL: AWARENESS OF LANGUAGE

The stage manager is the person frequently establishing tone, standards for civility, and reading the room. Intentionally incorporating anti-racist language can prioritize the deconstruction of systems of oppression.

Practices

- Assess the common phrases you use and diagnose whether they carry any racist meaning. **Here is a list of some examples.**
- Ask yourself about any oppressed identities that you could be excluding or unintentionally harming. Remove this language from your vocabulary and speak up as an ally when you hear racist language.
- Establish boundaries when racist language is part of the content of a play, clearly stating how that language will be used by different members of the company. This strategy is especially important for stage managers who will prompt or stand-in for a particular character.
- Rehearse saying specific racial identifiers aloud as part of anti-racist practice. Fear or discomfort can surface when naming collaborators as Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian.

TOOL: ACTIVE ALLYSHIP

The stage manager can employ allyship practices that demand courageous risk and specific daily action.

Practices

- Speak up as an ally and stage manager, taking on the responsibility of disrupting and interrupting racist aggression towards non-White colleagues who have been harmed.
- Question microaggressions that are typically normalized in the production process, like a White colleague commenting that a Black actor speaks Shakespeare well, a White director asking a Black performer to “fix” their natural hair, or comments that a Black artist only got the position due to their race. Other allies in the room share the responsibility of informing collaborators of discriminatory behavior.
- Recognize that everyone is impacted when one person is oppressed. White stage managers who are allies might be afraid of other people assuming they are speaking for, or silencing, a marginalized person. However, it is powerful for a White ally to speak for themselves and quickly and loudly name when racist behavior is present.

TOOL: OPENING CONVERSATIONS BY ACKNOWLEDGING AND NAMING

The stage manager is uniquely positioned to lead by example and directly address unspoken racial dynamics that influence the production process.

Practices

- Acknowledge the racial composition of the room and explicitly state the racial dynamics in response to the work being produced. For example, stating to the company that you are part of an all-White stage management team managing an entirely Black cast. Or, naming that you are the only non-White member of a creative team. This practice fosters transparency by accepting that our individual racial identities have an impact on the process.
- Manage casual comments rooted in racism and unintentional microaggressions by identifying stereotypes within the work, such as Black bodies seen as property or criminal, “the magical Negro,” or “the Latin lover.”
- Recommend that the director and creative team open conversations about race, racial identities, code-switching, and racial stereotypes during the early days of the process. For example, opening conversations about costumes, hair, and makeup are especially important since, even within a multiracial cast, the default might be to white skin color and hair texture.

TOOL: COMPASSION, TRANSPARENCY, AND HOLDING SPACE

The stage manager can manage the daily process with compassion and can engage in transparent communication in service of removing perceptions of policing and overseeing, and to debunk notions of stage managers as officers. These anti-racist practices are especially important when the stage manager’s racial identity has historically oppressed the cast member’s racial identity.

Practices

- Listen, hold space, and advocate for non-White company members who share with you that they are experiencing racial aggression from another collaborator.
- Inform the company transparently that rehearsal and performance reports are for the creative and production teams to share information, not documents used to implicate performers.
- Reveal why your stage management track necessitates following a particular cast member or checking-in on certain performers at specific times. Typically, the reasoning has to do with safety and other circumstances. Sharing this information can alleviate feelings of being surveilled or not trusted.
- Apply a compassionate tone and demeanor when responding to lateness, prioritizing the person over the task.
- Allow the consequences embedded in a policy or guideline to be the penalty instead of punishing a performer with your words or behavior when a rule has been broken.

The tools and practices outlined above are the foundational beginning of our anti-racist stage management curriculum. Our work has been informed by many, including Jones and Okun, **Ibram X. Kendi**, **Nicole Brewer**, and the **Diversity & Inclusion Department at Actors' Equity Association**. Our commitment to anti-racist stage management is imperative in this moment of awareness and vitally important in the creation of a truly just and equitable American theatre.

APPENDIX D: HOLD, PLEASE: ADDRESSING URGENCY AND OTHER WHITE SUPREMACIST STANDARDS IN STAGE MANAGEMENT

This piece, “Hold Please: Addressing Urgency and Other White Supremacist Standards in Stage Management” by Miguel Flores, R. Christopher Maxwell, John Meredith, Alexander Murphy, Quinn O’Connor, Phyllis Smith, and Chris Waters, was originally published on HowlRound Theatre Commons (<https://howlround.com/hold-please>), on 15 October 2020 and is reprinted in this dissertation with permission from the authors.

Regardless of your age, race, or political leanings, if you live in a culture touched by colonialism, it is inevitable that racist ideals have crept into your work—theatrical work included. As such, anyone in the field—including the seven of us working as stage managers across the United States—must actively dismantle these aspects of our beliefs and practices. For stage managers in particular—whether acting as a production stage manager, assistant, or intern—we must be mindful of the ways we facilitate our rehearsal and performance processes. Choosing not to practice continual self-reflection and adjustment perpetuates harm to ourselves, everyone around us, and particularly Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC).

In their book ***Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups***, activist-scholars Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun name thirteen characteristics of white supremacy culture in the workplace. With items like urgency, perfectionism, and objectivity, the list doesn’t look all too different from a stage management job description. Not only are stage managers often guilty of these characteristics, these are industry standards we have been explicitly trained to cultivate. Narda E Alcorn and Lisa Porter recently wrote a wonderful article providing a foundational curriculum on **committing to anti-racist stage management**. We believe a continuous education like the one they provide is crucial for all stage managers, and we want to continue this vital conversation. As educators, mentors, and peers, we have a responsibility to dismantle harmful precedents and share new and inclusive ways forward. While we couldn’t possibly cover every aspect of white supremacy within stage management norms, we want to explore a few places we have seen white supremacist culture play out—focusing on urgency, quantity over quality, perfectionism, objectivity, and power-hoarding—that we can uproot in our workplaces.

URGENCY: SLOW DOWN

As the people with the stopwatches, stage managers keep an eye on schedules and breaks to ensure goals are met by the end of the day. With limited hours in the week, shrinking rehearsal periods, and the ever-looming deadline of opening night, it feels like compulsive urgency is, in fact, a necessity to create theatre. It’s unshakably rooted in our ethos—just typing out the words “slow down” feels blasphemous in a way.

But when urgency is the driving force, it doesn’t actually make our work better, it only serves to squander thoughtful decision-making and cultivate environments where oppression and abuse thrive. For example, stage managers may use urgency as a justification for discrimination by saying there “just wasn’t time” to bring BIPOC people into the conversation. By choosing a quick solution over ensuring BIPOC people are part of the decisions that affect them, valuable insight is lost and solutions that favor white people and white-centric values are inevitably reached.

Many people are deterred from speaking out against microaggressions, harassment, and abuse during an individual project because it will be over soon and they don't want to be the one responsible for disrupting the already crammed process. Or, if they do speak up, it gets written off because there just "isn't time to deal with that right now." But there is, unequivocally, always time to address misconduct and we must drastically shift attitudes within ourselves to match this fact. Especially as people in a position of authority within the room, stage managers cannot allow ourselves to be complicit in placing the needs of a show above the needs of the actual human beings creating it.

QUALITY OVER QUANTITY: RESCHEDULE

White supremacist culture contaminates the stage management process even before we step into the rehearsal room. Just three families own the majority of Broadway theatres, and across the country, leadership like regional **theatre boards** skew heavily white, wealthy, and male. This leads to a labor structure that is directly driven by white supremacist ideologies that favor capital over the individual and quantity over quality. Theatres have a complex history of pushing against labor laws to continue working long hours—things like state requirements for days of rest or, recently, **California's Assembly Bill 5**. For people with multiple jobs, people with disabilities that prevent long working hours, people with religious and cultural events outside of the Christian calendar, parents, students, and so many others, a capital-driven production schedule could be the final barrier barring them from a career as a theatre artist. Many schedules, like the ones based on the **NEAT rulebook** in New England, land at or just shy of a full-time schedule. But unless the production pays a steady income comparable to a full-time job—and most don't—it's quite likely these long hours are just a portion of an artist's workday. Rather than cramming in productions to maxed-out template calendars, we should standardize human-focused practices like tailoring schedules to the individuals working on a show and their specific needs.

There's an array of capital-driven standards that we can start dismantling. Non-theatrical companies across the globe are already exploring **the benefits of a four-day workweek**, while the United States theatre industry still hasn't yet caught up with decades-old labor reform, making us one of the few industries that still works six days a week. Just a single day off is simply not enough to rest and recover from the week. Providing a second day is crucial for people to see their families, work outside jobs, and even have a life as a human being. But cutting a day out does not necessitate tacking those hours onto another day. We are not obligated to try and puzzle every contractually allowed hour into our schedules.

One of the more egregious scheduling norms that has started to gain widespread scrutiny lately is the ten-out-of-twelve, a tech rehearsal where actors are generally called for twelve hours and get a two-hour break in the middle, and the production team typically works closer to fourteen hours or more. The rigor is compounded as these rehearsals take place during the longest week of the whole process—up to fifty-five hours on **LORT** contracts. It's an exercise in diminishing returns and unnecessary burnout. At least from anecdotal experience, the last few hours of the ten-out-of-twelve often lead to the most frustration, most slip-ups, and work that will need to be redone the following morning. By focusing on getting the most hours rather than the best work and fair treatment of workers, we're putting people in a position to fail—on top of putting their health and safety at risk.

Our industry has instilled the expectation of artists to put the show ahead of everything else, and it's taking a massive toll on our safety and well-being. According to **the Center for a**

New American Dream, people who work eleven or more hours a day are two and a half times more likely to develop depression and sixty times more likely to develop heart disease. In addition, **multiple studies have shown** long work hours and work-related stress to have adverse effects on a wide range of health impacts, including anxiety, sleep quality, substance use, mental health, physical health, and injuries. Prioritizing quantity over quality is a colossal tentpole of white supremacy that works to put organizational revenue before the physical and mental impact on the workers.

Change is possible. Places like **Baltimore Center Stage** have already committed to eliminating ten-out-of-twelves and standardizing a five-day rehearsal week. Stage managers must use whatever authority we have in the scheduling process to implement human-focused scheduling. We can explicitly work against urgency-driven expectations by proactively having open conversations about thoughtful, realistic, and sustainable scheduling that creates room for a team of diverse experiences. We should make a point of using breaks to de-stress, and taking days off, and encouraging those around us (particularly assistants, interns, and those without union protections) to do the same. By finding new ways to structure our production processes and taking care of the individual, we gain a multifaceted, well-rested, better-functioning, and healthier team.

PERFECTIONISM & OBJECTIVITY: EXPECT AND ACCEPT MISTAKES

One step to start tackling capitalist-driven tendencies in theatre spaces is by reframing our view of mistakes in the workplace. For stage managers specifically, there is a pervading expectation that we aren't supposed to have any opinions or emotions—we are meant to be perfect robotic beings only around to serve the production. While it may be nice to feel omniscient and omnipotent from time to time, leaning into this idea can only set us up for failure since we are, in fact, neither of those things.

The expectation of perfection is explicitly taught in college programs like the one of our authors, John, attended—they were told a rehearsal should never have to pause on the stage manager's behalf. Even things like small typos or grammatical errors get called out as an unacceptable flaw. Phyllis, another of our authors, vividly recalled a time when colleagues called her out in the middle of a production meeting for a misspelling in a past report. And while precision can be helpful, if the meaning is still perfectly conveyed, this is often unnecessary nitpicking that redirects energy away from the overarching goal of communication and, notably, undermines the talented stage managers out there with Dyslexia.

The issues of urgency and perfectionism blend together into a culture many stage managers have created, where we commend overworking as a badge of honor and chastise not using every possible second to work as a failure. It's expected of stage managers to give up our free time by working through breaks or staying on call during our designated days off so we can respond to issues at a moment's notice. When we factor in setup, cleanup, creating reports, sending daily calls, updating paperwork, responding to emails, and any other tasks added to our plates, stage managers often work overtime without compensation.

Black stage managers are often isolated within their theatre community and must constantly work to prove themselves among a sea of white and white-assumed peers. The burden to be perfect is amplified for BIPOC, women, queer people, disabled people, and especially individuals living at the intersection of those identities. There is no room for mistakes—they have to be practically infallible to be given a shot.

Artists at these intersections must assimilate to professionalism standards of how to talk, dress, and carry themselves, turning on their “stage management voice” and toning down their Black, feminine, and queer mannerisms to be listened to and respected by their colleagues. These artists are told over and over again—implicitly and explicitly—that if they don’t carry themselves in a way that makes white people comfortable, they won’t get hired again.

Slipping up, showing emotions “incorrectly,” or having opinions that conflict with the director could bar these artists from working at that theatre again. Not only is their own hiring potential at risk, but they have the additional weight of representing all BIPOC. “Stereotype threat”—the fear of acting in a way that confirms racial stereotypes—leads to a continual self-policing so that employers can’t point to them as a reason to not hire BIPOC artists in the future. For white stage managers, the standard of perfectionism furthers the idea that stage managers should be objective in their work. Objectivity is, however, impossible for human beings to achieve—we bring in our viewpoints and experiences wherever we go. White supremacist culture will always deem white beliefs as the norm and best option. If white stage managers act from a belief that they’re just stating facts and following rules, they are ignoring the places prejudice is influencing their work and miss the opportunity to bring in new viewpoints.

Stage managers must question where their standards of professionalism are rooted and who they serve, and we must make space for forms of management and expression that are outside of our own. We can create a culture that gives everyone agency to speak up by embracing our mistakes and those of our colleagues as part of the generative process, and actively asking for the opinions of everyone in the room. Phyllis’s biggest advice for young Black stage managers is: “Stop apologizing and know that you’re enough. Practice taking up space without code-switching for other people’s comfort. Be okay with voicing your opinions, even if they disrupt the current flow and need time to be processed.”

POWER-HOARDING: REDEFINE THE PSM-ASM RELATIONSHIP

When brainstorming manifestations of white supremacy culture in stage management, the production stage manager (PSM) to assistant stage manager (ASM) relationship elicited some of the most potent responses from the authors of this piece. Many ASMs spoke about feeling disrespected, uncredited for their work, and given menial tasks outside their actual job duties in a way that gets brushed off as part of “earning our stripes.” The concept of being seen and not heard is alive and well for ASMs in many rehearsal rooms.

On top of all the standards of professionalism outlined above, ASMs often have their input diminished further with a version of the “one voice rule”—a principle that information from the stage management team should always come from the PSM. Quinn, one of the article’s authors, works as a female, disabled ASM, has often felt pushed into the role of the “quiet wife”—only speak when spoken to, and sometimes not even then. While this may create the appearance of a united front and streamlined communication, it often does the opposite. By shutting down other voices or requiring differing perspectives be filtered through one figurehead, it dismisses the ASM’s autonomy and slows down the process.

On one project where another author, Miguel, worked as an ASM, the PSM required the team to turn in their paperwork a week before tech to be “reviewed.” Miguel then got back a printed version with corrections in red ink, including notes on font choices (and what they should be) and an expectation of seeing “corrected” versions for review. This PSM and Miguel were the same age and working on a professional contract. We must always be on the lookout for

infantilizing our colleagues—particularly BIPOC stage managers—in the guise of unsolicited “teaching” or “mentoring.”

One antidote to this mindset is focusing on completion, not competition—a mantra passed down by stage manager Deb Acquavella. Each member of the stage management team is working to achieve the same goal of a safe and smooth production. Having multiple points of view and avenues to turn to for information doesn’t reduce this goal but rather expands it. If an ASM knows an answer right off the bat, why wait for the PSM to dredge up the information just because they’re the designated one voice? We need to stop viewing the ASM as working below the PSM and instead put value on each person’s unique duties and expertise. We then become a collaborative team where everyone is valued for their contribution, rather than bolstering egos. To that end, PSMs should welcome change from their team. Whether it’s the formatting of paperwork or general methodologies, there is no singular right way to stage manage. Seeking to make those around us think and act in a singular way is part of white supremacy’s binary focus on “right” and “wrong.” What we learned in school or from past mentors isn’t the only correct way to do things. If, for example, an ASM’s paperwork looks different than the one we make, instead of automatically asking for them to conform to what is familiar to us, check if we can still parse out the information and if it still serves its essential purpose. There is, of course, room for feedback and growth, but don’t let prescriptivism get in the way of new manners of thinking. These ideas also encompass production assistants and interns who often replace the role of an ASM but are given a different title so they can be vastly underpaid or even unpaid regardless of the level of work and hours put in. This provides yet another financial barrier to entry in this field. While stage managers may not always have a say in the ASM hiring process, one step we can take is to require a paid ASM on any contract we sign. And if we do participate in the hiring process, it’s important to not always turn to the same few ASMs we’ve worked with in the past. Nepotism, which is what this is when we get down to it, serves to give an insular bubble of the same people—often white—paid opportunities and creates an additional barrier for new individuals to gain experience.

WHAT ELSE?

There are so many places we, as stage managers, can be culpable in perpetuating white supremacy. These ideas are just a handful of the issues we need to reckon with. We hope this encourages stage managers to reevaluate the standards we set and take time to hold space for all artists. And we want to know: What else are our fellow stage managers doing to build a more equitable theatrical landscape?

APPENDIX E: STAGE MANAGEMENT ACTION ITEMS

This list builds on the work of Appendix C and Appendix D to create actionable items for stage management's future. It would not have been possible without the work of: Narda Alcorn, Lisa Porter, Miguel Flores, R. Christopher Maxwell, John Meredith, Alexander Murphy, Quinn O'Connor, Phyllis Smith, and Chris Waters. This should not be considered an exhaustive list.

DEFINE STAGE MANAGEMENT AS A FIELD

Engage in a field-wide discussion to determine the definition of stage management

- The field should consider:
 - The fundamental, paired down, purpose of the stage manager within the production process
 - Categories of labor performed, including but not limited to:
 - Advocation of the Production
 - Interdepartmental Communication of information
 - Leadership role
 - Emotional Intelligence/ Labor
 - Conflict Management
 - Administration Duties
 - Paperwork creation
 - Archival recordkeeping
 - Organization
 - Facilitating and Coordinating rehearsals
 - Artistry
 - Calling the show
 - Flexibility and Adaptability of the field
 - How does the field best serve the production?
 - Discuss whether or not adjacent titles that frequently perform stage management labor will be included in the field-wide definition or if separate definitions are necessary to delineate the knowledge and experience necessary.
 - Production Stage Manager
 - Stage Manager / Calling Stage Manager
 - Assistant Stage Manager / Backstage Stage Manager
 - Production Assistant
 - Production Intern
 - Discuss whether or not adjacent venues/performance stage managers will be included in the field-wide definition. (A secondary conversation would be whether AEA, or another union, was willing/able/interested in claiming jurisdiction over these stage managers)
 - Amusement Park Stage Managers
 - Drag Show/Entertainment Stage Managers
 - Sport Event Stage Managers
 - Corporate Event Stage Managers
 - Reconsider how we describe the "ideal" stage manager
 - Retrain to expect and accept mistakes.

- Reorient “likability” to learn how to interrupt and take the time to address for microaggressions.
- Question current standards of professionalism and professional behavior to encompass other interpretations.
- Refocus the stage management department into a team effort.
 - Restore the ASM’s former agency (See Chapter 1)
- Apply a compassionate tone and demeanor when responding to lateness, prioritizing the person over the task.
- Allow the consequences embedded in a policy or guideline to be the penalty instead of punishing a performer with your words or behavior when a rule has been broken.
- Create transparency around the work of the stage manager and demystify the labor performed by the stage manager to alleviate feelings of surveillance that may harm others.
- See Appendix D for more ideas on disrupting the “ideal” stage manager.
- Adopt anti-racist behaviors into the role of the stage manager.
 - Intentionally incorporate anti-racist language to prioritize the deconstruction of systems of oppression.
 - Establish boundaries when racist language is part of the content of a play, clearly state how that language will be used by different members of the company.
 - Speak up as an ally and stage manager, taking on the responsibility of disrupting and interrupting racist aggression towards non-White colleagues who have been harmed.
 - Recommend that the director and creative team open conversations about race, racial identities, code-switching, and racial stereotypes during the early days of the process. For example, opening conversations about costumes, hair, and makeup are especially important since, even within a multiracial cast, the default might be to white skin color and hair texture.
 - Listen, hold space, and advocate for non-White company members who share with you that they are experiencing racial aggression from another collaborator.
 - See Appendix C for more ideas on adopting anti-racist behaviors.

TRAINING CURRENT AND FUTURE STAGE MANAGERS

Reassess the prerequisite traits and prior experience expectations for all incoming students.

- Reevaluate the interview questions and judging criteria to create a more equitable framework for consideration.

Reconsider contemporary training standards and experiences to better prepare future stage managers.

- Ensure training covers each of the labor categories of the accepted definition of stage management. This should include:
 - Paperwork creation
 - Calling the show
 - Emotional Intelligence
 - Leadership modules

- Conflict management
- Anti-racism training
- Other categories as defined by the field.

Consider adopting and offering continuing education course/workshops for current stage managers.

- Continuing education courses should fill gaps in training, aid the field in adapting to new technologies/theatrical practices and build on best practices.

Continue to build on existing mentorship opportunities to expand the field. This could include:

- Expanding current mentorship relationships. Connecting mentors and mentees with other mentors and mentees for continued conversation and multiple viewpoints.
- A future-ship, created to connect middle and high school stage managers with college and professional stage managers.
- A return-ship, created to reconnect mid-career stage managers to current practices after a break, regardless of the cause (financial hardship, maternity/paternity leave, caregiving, etc.)
- Instead of only focusing on how professional mentorships impact younger stage managers, professionals should consider seeking feedback from younger stage managers. One example may include asking the mentee for feedback on paperwork to find new ways to improve.

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATION

The stage management field must consider which union or professional organization would best suite stage management needs.

- Stage managers must:
 - Dedicate time and resources to amounting fact-finding missions to discover:
 - How many hours do stage managers actually work?
 - What is the breakdown of such tasks?
 - How much money is misused by producers who don't hire knowledgeable stage managers for their productions?
 -
 - Petition bargaining partners to accept the agreed-upon definition as a means of creating boundaries.
 - This includes specifying in contracts overtime coverage.
 - What tasks performed outside of rehearsal should count towards overtime hours?
 - What tasks performed outside of rehearsal should be included in the salary?
 - What tasks are visible? Invisible?
 - Advocate for experienced stage managers to be included on every contract.
 - Advocate for an experienced ASM on every contract.
 - Advocate for stage management understudy coverage for sick or vacation days, especially at regional theatres.
 - Ensure this person is qualified to cover stage management positions.
 - Advocating for inclusion in all press releases and other promotional material.
 - Educating fellow actors as to the historical connections between the two fields.
 - Including stage management's inclusion in the union's founding.

QUALIFICATIONS

Stage managers must discuss how the field wants to confront hiring challenges to ensure competent stage managers and assistant stage managers.

In other words: how will the field limit accessibility to stage management contracts to ensure those taking stage management contracts are stage managers, while simultaneously ensuring that these limits do not perpetuate systemic racism. One solution may be:

- Create multi-track qualification pathways to allow interested stage managers a variety of routes to success:
 - o College/graduate training programs.
 - o Training via experience through the professional organization, similar to the DGA.
 - o Portfolio Review, similar to United Scenic Artists.
 - o Workshops through the professional organization.
- Consider how each of these perpetuate systemic racism and create pipelines to overcome.
 - o Engaging middle and high school stage managers.
 - o Bridging underrepresented communities to qualification resources.
- Explore non-traditional ways of demonstrating proficiencies.
- Create a better database of stage management profiles that is easy to use for all parties (producers for finding stage managers, stage managers for finding work, and the professional organization for managing the data).