

# Filtered Cultures: Confronting Latinx Diversity in the Publishing Industry

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## Introduction

- Editors, agents, and managers within the publishing industry serve as necessary “**gatekeepers**” to the world of publication, acquiring and publishing the highest quality of work in the written word.
- The “gatekeeping” role evolves into a source of imbalance of power and inclusivity when both the industry’s staff and the authors they publish suffer from a lack of diversity in their midst and in their books (often referred to as bibliodiversity).
- In an industry that has remained predominantly white, authors of color have had their stories dismissed or altered by unconscious biases trying to market stories featuring familiar and toxic racial stereotypes.
- **Latinx authors** experience a formidable portion of such obstacles, where only works exhibiting familiar Latinx stereotypes (such as stories depicting only the struggles of “crossing the border” or escaping exile) achieve publication, while other literary pieces showing the Latinx community in everyday encounters and human situations go ignored or dismissed as uninteresting.

## Background & Impact

- In the past, translations served as the sole backbone of Spanish publishing. When books in English written by Latinx authors began to surface along with the more commonly-known translations, sales became less predictable.
- A significant amount of early Latinx representation in literature was composed by white authors following stereotypes.
  - Such novelizations presented normative and restrictive perspectives about what it’s like to be Latinx in the US.
  - They used the discourse of assimilation to negatively paint the regional and provincial ways of Latinx communities, while reinforcing the criminalization of young Latino immigrant boys (Ventura, 2016).
- Since children are the age group most drastically impacted by representation in media, inaccurate representations can prove extremely harmful for literature targeting a K-12 audience.
- The current canon of K-12 literature anthologies has a tremendous impact on the **individual growth** and **reading comprehension** for Latinx students.
  - When children become exposed to culturally-relevant literature, they receive personal affirmation while gaining the ability to connect text to self in order to promote reading comprehension (Tovar-Hilbert, 2019).
- By presenting young readers with accurate representations of the colorful Latinx persona in literature, publishers can foment a healthy and socially-diverse future where neither Latinx nor other minorities battle oppression within the media consumed.

## Statistics & Initiatives

- Lee and Low Books performs a survey every four years to document diversity within the publishing industry, incorporating data from all Big 5 publishers (Penguin Random House, Hachette, Harper Collins, Simon and Schuster, Macmillan), all major review journals, and the recent addition of academic presses and literary agencies.
- The most recent **Diversity Baseline Survey** (DBS 2.0) recorded results from 2019, receiving 7,893 responses and showing a 112% increase in responses from DBS 1.0.
- According to the survey, 76% of all publishing staff are white, showing **more diversity at the top** with a drop from 86% in 2015 to 78% white industry leaders in 2019.
- In terms of the editorial level, the department appears **whiter than it was in 2015**, with the number of people self-identifying as white increasing from 82% to 85%.
- Several initiatives have already begun taking a stand in favor of further Latinx and overall multicultural diversity in publishing. Some examples include:
  - The **Association of American Publishers** (AAP) is making efforts to establish compositional diversity councils within publishing firms and facilitating programs with a wide range of multicultural organizations (Deahl, 2016).
  - **We Need Diverse Books** (WNDB), a non-profit organization given credit for a 4% increase in the publishing of books with ‘multicultural content’ in 2014 by the Cooperative Children’s Book Center in America (Booth, 2018).
  - **#DignidadLiteraria**, a social media movement focused on increasing Latinx representation in publishing.

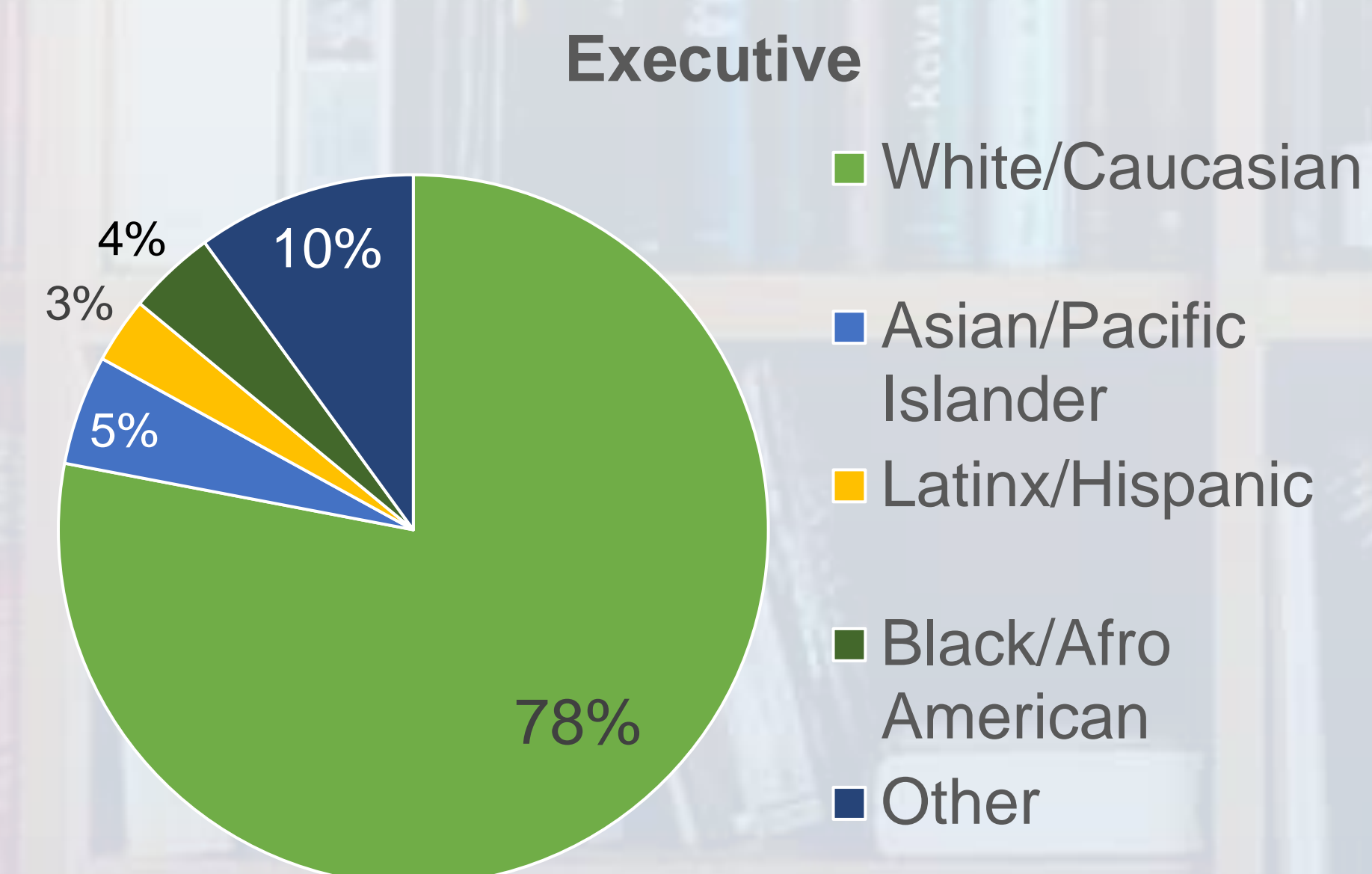


Figure 1. Results of DBS 2.0 at the **Executive** level of the industry (Lee and Low Books, 2020).

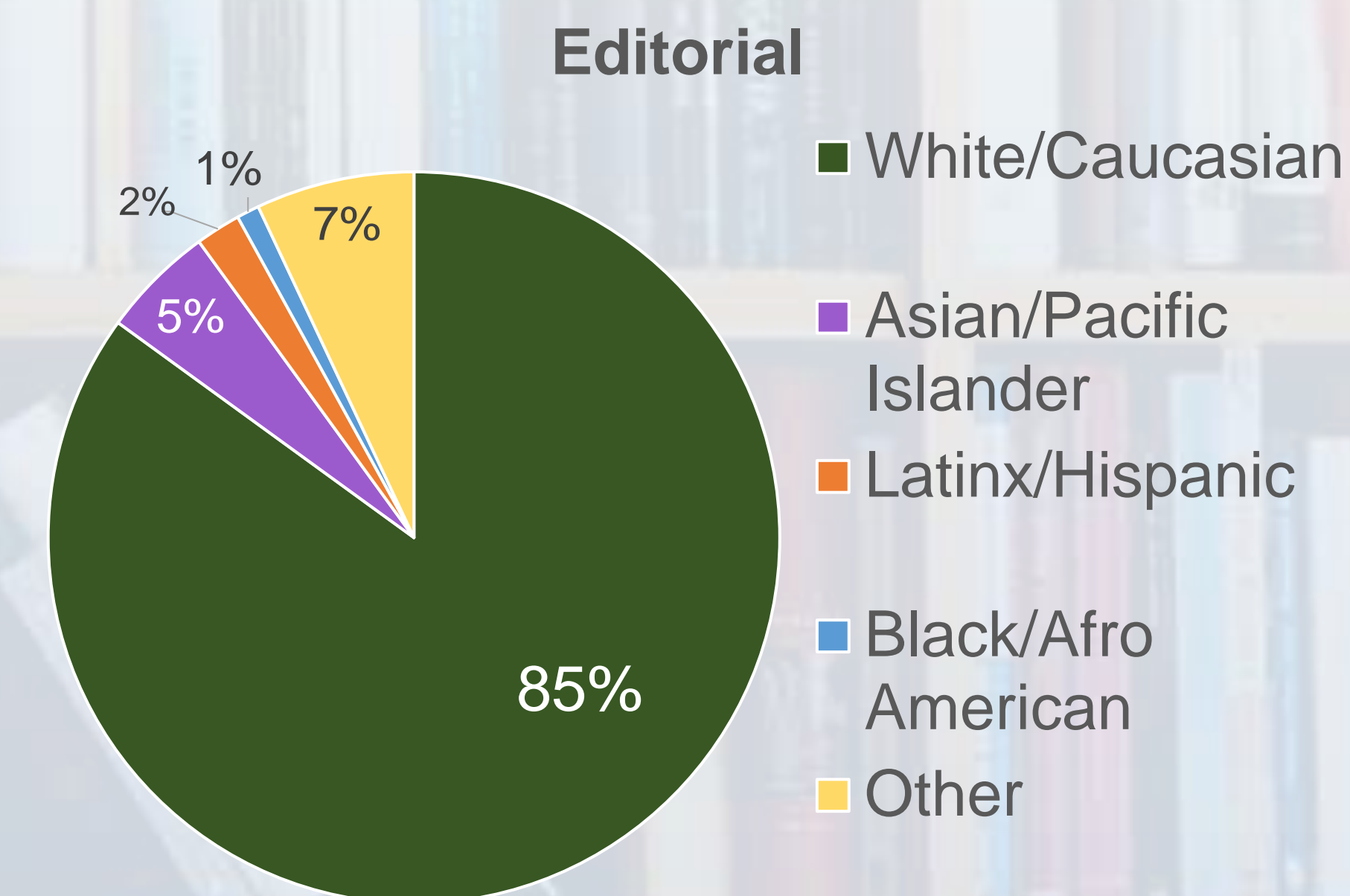


Figure 2. Results of DBS 2.0 at the **Editorial** department (Lee and Low Books, 2020).



Figure 3. Banner for We Need Diverse Books non-profit organization. [www.diversebooks.org](http://www.diversebooks.org)

## Recommendations

- All publishing firms, from the Big 5 to indie publishing houses, should place greater efforts to incorporate structural diversity through **recruitment and hiring** by:
  - providing a hiring manager toolkit ideally designed to help managers prepare job descriptions, identify and remove potential biases, and ensure fair interviews.
  - expanding partnerships with schools and organizations featuring significant Black and Hispanic enrollment.
  - hold writing contests within high schools with economically and ethnically diverse students.
- What can we do **outside the business environment** to achieve social change?
  - School organizations and librarians should invite Latinx authors to speak to teachers about their experiences as Latinxs in the US, how they became writers, and the role of diversity in their books.

## Conclusion

- Amidst a society undergoing rapid diversification, it proves astounding and disconcerting to uncover such a **silent underrepresentation** hidden beneath nearly all the creative literature the world consumes.
- The book publishing industry possesses the capability and influence necessary to **mold culture** via the written word.
- If the professionals of the industry responsible for the magnification of authorial voices continue to bear no diversity in their midst, Latinx communities may never be truly and justly represented in the texts they consume.
- Both reader audiences and publishers within the industry must strive for more **multicultural representation** in their texts and diverse **work environments** in order to see meaningful change in the next Diversity Baseline Survey in 2024.

## References

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