AN OPEN LETTER TO MY POST PRODUCTION COMMUNITY

Hi guys, I'm Jamie Nelsen. I've worked as a picture editor in Los Angeles for about 20 years. My career began in a tape vault in Orange County and since then I've edited countless reality television series, won a few awards, and went on to edit scripted comedies. Now I produce the •*ish* series (black•*ish*, grown•*ish* and mixed•*ish*) for mega-producer Kenya Barris at ABC Studios.

If you're anything like me you've been having a rough couple of months. All the collective anxiety and uncertainty around the pandemic has been wreaking havoc in our personal and professional lives. And just as things were beginning to feel easier, a black man named George Floyd was murdered in the streets of Minneapolis by a group of white police officers. And we all watched.

I'm writing this on Sunday May 31 and my beautiful city is in pain. Like many of you I turned to social media and heard the collective voice calling specifically to me: a white woman. It was the voice of my black friends and colleagues, "Please. We're exhausted and can't do this alone. It's time for you to help us."

This is where I turn to what I know: Post-production. This is a community that I love. It's given me a purpose, a home, a creative voice... but sadly it's also been a place where the privilege of the white male has been allowed to dominate, largely unchecked.

I am not black but I know what it's like to be the only one of my kind in a professional community comprised almost exclusively of white men. For most of my jobs I have been the only female in my post department and have often experienced wage-disparity due to my gender. In my experience the loudest most powerful voices in post-production have been those of white men. In fact, most post-production departments across this town have been staffed almost exclusively by white men. White men dominate the pages of editing and post-tech publications. White men dominate the post-production categories throughout award season. So now in the light of this new call to action from our black friends and neighbors, I pose these questions: Why are so few black people given opportunities in post? How many black editors have you given an opportunity to be a part of your team? How many black assistant editors have you given a chance? How about black sound editors and mixers? Black music editors? Black composers? Black VFX artists? Black colorists? Black Post Producers? Why such a heavily-publicized push for black directors, black writers, black actors but yet post-production is still so acceptably lily-white? And why do we, as leaders in post-production accept this? Or maybe the only question that matters: Are we finally going to do something about it?

I started working for Kenya 6 years ago as the black•*ish* pilot editor and last year I was promoted to the role of producer. Through his leadership I've been able to closely examine the racial issues that face this country. I've had to do the very uncomfortable task of coming to terms with my own past prejudices, infecting me like a virus from years of living and working exclusively amongst non-black people. I've also come to understand and accept my privilege as a white person. As a producer, I now have real input in the staffing of our post departments. At Kenya's urging (yes, I'm embarrassed to say that it took *urging*), I began to seek out resumes for people of color (POC). Why did it take urging? Because I didn't want to do it. Why? Because I knew it would be hard. And guess what? It was! I mean yes of course there are some black people to find in post (https://cinemontage.org/category/cut-to-black/) but for me it's been a frustrating search. I found myself asking: Where the heck are they? I mean, seriously - where are all the black people in post?

The truth is that they ARE out there. But in speaking with some black post colleagues, they express that the opportunities do not exist for them like they do for their non-black counterparts. They watch as their white counterparts take interviews and get jobs easier and faster. They get passed up constantly for less experienced editors, coordinators, supervisors and producers who are white. Some editors leave the industry all together because of lack of opportunity. The truth is, we are avoiding giving black people the opportunity to sit at the table in order to keep our post teams comfortably and traditionally white. Black editors and post staff are out there. They're good. They're ready. They just need to be given the same opportunity to join our teams. And when they join our teams they need to be treated with the same respect and dignity that we grant white team members. My black colleagues who have been successful in post still express having to work twice as hard to get where they are. Black people in post are given less opportunities to fail and correct themselves because teammates are hyper focused on their flaws. This can't be the culture we create and maintain in post. Black artists in post should have the same freedom to make mistakes, grow and advance the same way white people are allowed to.

I am not the first person to bring up the lack of diversity in post. It's encouraging to see the steering committees and teams working so hard to cultivate diversity in our local 700 union, ACE, and TV Academy membership. But why does the burden of diversity outreach depend solely on the few POC in post? Isn't it time for the white post community to take the steps to break the cycle? **To the white men in post:** instead of continuing to recycle opportunities for your close white friends and college classmates, what can you do instead to reach out to the black artists within our community? Why not reach out to your network and specifically ask for black people's resumes? (Be mindful that asking for POC is not the same as black. Many black people in post still get pushed to the bottom of the POC pool. Inquire specifically about black people's resumes.) What about calling around to local high schools, colleges, and trade schools in underserved areas of Los Angeles and offering to speak to the students about post-production? Or starting your own outreach group through your studio/ post facility? **To the women in post:** You've made it through the door. What are you doing now to hold it open for the young women of color behind you? Need ideas? Let's form an outreach group! **To the white post executives in your windowed offices:** What are YOU doing to create more diverse post teams? Isn't it time to create a full-swing diversity initiative in post? When the hiring of post teams is left exclusively up to the post executives at the major studios, we typically end up with a stack of resumes for white men. It was only by spending hours of scouring Imdb.com, cold-calling, and relentlessly emailing the few POC I know in post that I got a few resumes for black editors, yearning for their first shot or their next credit or just a chance to chat over a cup of coffee. Post executives: what are YOU doing? How can YOU help?

To myself I ask these questions: Where have I failed to cultivate diversity? Where have I been ignorant/ misinformed/ complicit? What personal behaviors do I still need to examine and correct? Where can I improve/make amends?

To my beloved post-production family: Isn't it time to stop accepting a dominantly white male culture of post-production in this town? What if we decided to no longer be comfortable on a mix stage with no women or black artists present? What if we made it our mission to staff each post department or sound team with at least 50% women? At least 50% POC? Why are we collectively livid with #OscarsSoWhite while we're perfectly fine staffing even our "woke" "black" television shows and films with entirely white male post teams? Isn't the entire process of post just as important to the art of storytelling as writing,

directing, and acting? Then why is post-production continuously exempt from the progress of the rest of our industry's culture? And more importantly: what are we going to do about it?

Time's up, post-production community. We can do better. We must do better. It starts with me. It starts with you. Pretty soon we're gonna get back to work. Will we allow the 2020-21 production season to be business as usual? Will we just keep staffing up edit bays and sound stages with the same, old, outdated staffing standards? It's the year 2020. There is civil unrest in our streets. What will your legacy be?

The time has come to FIX THIS PROBLEM IN POST. We can do it. Now let's get to work.