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News

WEST END MUSICAL USES MINSTREL SHOWS AND HUMOUR TO TACKLE POWERFUL STORY

# All singing, all dancing race-hate drama

West End calling: Brandon Victor Dixon, centre, and his co-stars



**Louise Jury**  
Chief Arts Correspondent

THE *Scottsboro Boys* musical prompted protests when it premiered in New York for using the black and white minstrel style to tell a pivotal story in the race history of America.

But as the show arrives in London's West End four years later, one of its original stars has defended its twist on "blacking up".

Brandon Victor Dixon, 33, from New York, said the story of the miscarriage of justice in which nine young black men were wrongly accused of rape in Alabama in 1931 needed to be told to new generations.

The case, which prompted Rosa Parks to join the American civil rights movement, was resolved

## COLMAN CALLS FOR A BROADER CHURCH IN FILM INDUSTRY

OLIVIA COLMAN said diversity was not only about race as she called for opportunities for all in the film and TV industry.

Speaking as she was appointed as a judge for a short film competition, the Broadchurch star, right, said it was important that a wide range of people had the chance to tell their stories.

She is joining Kathy Burke, Kwame Kwei-Armah, Full Monty director Peter

Cattaneo and playwright Bola Agbaje on the panel for the third TriForce Short Film Festival.

Colman, 40, said: "This is not just about race, it's about diversity in all its forms. TV and film are fundamentally about storytelling and it is important that as many voices as possible have the opportunity to tell

their stories." TriForce, a networking firm set up to raise diversity in the industry, had been working for years to improve opportunities for people from "truly diverse" backgrounds, she added.

Submissions are still open for the festival, which will be held on November 22 at Bafta in Piccadilly.

**Louise Jury**



only last year, when those convicted were cleared posthumously.

"It's an important part of American history and spawned a huge political civil rights movement," Dixon said.

"In America we're not big on responsibility and self-examination and do not educate ourselves on our history

and because of that a lot of these problems continue to exist."

The musical, by John Kander and Fred Ebb, involves black actors playing white as well as black characters – a subversion of black and white minstrel shows in which white actors "blacked up". Dixon said it "really makes a state-

ment", adding: "They use it in a powerful way to empower the boys. There are real dramatic honest moments juxtaposed with humour and song and dance. You're forced to enjoy yourself and then reflect on what you're enjoying. It's a masterpiece."

British actors including Idris Elba and

David Harewood have praised opportunities for black actors in America that do not exist here.

But Dixon, who is making his West End debut in the show as it transfers from an acclaimed run at the Young Vic, said work still remains to be done for black performers in America where "systems that were put in place a long time ago limit opportunities".

"It can be hard to talk about because it requires examination," he said. "But there are real efforts in certain industries."

He said film and television producers had become more willing to cast black actors "when the industry realised it didn't mean a loss in revenue".

■ Tickets for *The Scottsboro Boys* are available at a special preview price. Its official opening night at the Garrick Theatre is October 20.