

The messy story of the Bleach voice acting controversy, explained

As *Bleach: Thousand-Year Blood War*, a continuation of the popular *Bleach* anime – one of the “Big Three” of shonen anime series – continues its run, viewers were excited to see fan-favorite character Yoruichi make her first appearance in the show. But that excitement soured as fans and voice actors argued on social media over who has the “right” to voice a character of color, invoking the specter of racism versus nostalgia in voice casting.

On October 7th, Afro-Latina voice actress Anairis Quiñones announced on X (formerly Twitter) that she had been cast to voice Yoruichi in *Thousand-Year Blood War*.

The announcement was met with considerable excitement but also backlash as some fans reacted negatively that Quiñones now had the role instead of Wendee Lee, who originally voiced Yoruichi when the series began back in 2004.

Some called Quiñones a diversity hire, suggesting she was only chosen because of her race. “Stop changing our characters perfect voices just cause you found some colored voice actor to voice your black character,” one user wrote on X.

Others were upset because they felt Quiñones had quote-unquote stolen the role from Lee even though both performers voice other characters in the show. “This was a casting director forcing an agenda,” read another complaint on X.

Amidst the mix of congratulations and complaints, on October

21st, Quiñones announced that she would no longer be voicing the role and her recordings would be replaced. Wendee Lee would be taking her place.

As sympathies poured in from fans and fellow voice performers, Lee also appeared to argue with those expressing support. When a fellow voice performer expressed sympathy for Quiñones, saying it was unfortunate she had been recast, Lee replied, “just maintaining the iconic character.”

Lee, a seasoned voice actress known for her roles across decades of anime, cartoons, and video games, appeared to conflate support for Quiñones, a newer but successful performer, as an attack against her.

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Quiñones’ recasting and Lee’s response highlight the persistent tension between nostalgia, fan expectation, and racism in fandom spaces.

Though Lee claimed that the recast was because of a “scheduling error,” many saw the move as localizer and distributor Viz and anime dubbing company Studiopolis capitulating to pressure from those upset by the recast – no matter how suited Quiñones was for the role – simply because she wasn’t part of the original cast.

Lee said as much herself, asking how it could be “wrong” for Viz to maintain the original cast when colleagues were comforting Quiñones while also saying, in now-deleted posts, that she was the one who “established” the role.