Top row (from left): Indigenous spoken word artist JB The First Lady; Eric Reid and Colin Kaepernick; We See You White American Theater statement

Center row: Childish Gambino, *This is America*; The Belarus Free Theatre; Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA)

Bottom Row: Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*; The Jenin Freedom Theatre (Palestine); The Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women
Class Schedule: Weekly online modules on the Canvas learning management system
Instructor: David Letwin
E-mail: dpletwin@mgsa.rutgers.edu
Office Hours: By appointment via video chat
Canvas site: https://onlinelearning.rutgers.edu/canvas-login
Canvas Help Desk: 877 361.1144 (24/7)

Course Description & Overview

Dramatic practitioners and their audiences have long understood that art serves political, in addition to entertaining, ends. Recent years have witnessed an explosion of theatricalized, or “staged,” resistance to the injustice and inequality endemic to contemporary culture. Examples include plays and films that explicitly challenge embedded power hierarchies; radical disruptions in the public space, such as the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, Occupy Wall Street, and Take a Knee protests; and participatory community-engaged theater for social change. The process of theater and protest itself has also come under interrogation from within, informed by the Black Lives Matter and MeToo movements.

The issues these plays and performative acts address — gender oppression, racialized capitalism, colonialism and indigenous rights, alienation from mainstream society, mass incarceration, economic inequality, war and militarism, the growth of the surveillance state, homo- and transphobia, environmental destruction — reflect the concerns of a broad range of movements for restorative justice.

Through plays and other performance texts, videos, graphics, media accounts, and critical theory readings, the class will investigate both this current phenomenon as well as the rich tradition of theatricalized resistance that preceded and informed it.

The course content will be organized around three general areas of staged resistance:

- Plays/TV/films that consciously and critically interrogate unequal distributions of power on the basis of class, gender, ethnicity, sexual identity, colonialism, etc.
• Street protest, social movements, performance events, and disruptive/transgressive actions that incorporate theatrical elements.

• Community-engaged theater that privileges participatory engagement as a means for social change and/or self-growth.

Throughout these units, we will also examine the ways in which the practice of making/teaching staged resistance is itself influenced and shaped by its social justice concerns (example: *We See You White American Theater*).

The course will ask students to engage with such questions as:

• What, exactly, do the terms “resistance” and “social change” mean in the first place (who or what is being resisted and what change is being sought)?

• In what ways is theatricalized resistance both similar to and different from normative theater-making?

• Is there a difference between political drama and drama seeking social change?

• What are the unique challenges of participatory, community-engaged theater for social change, and how can it’s efficacy be evaluated?

• How do evolving perspectives on gender, race, class, and sexual orientation inform ideas of theater aimed at changing society?

In addition to exploring these questions, the course will encourage students to generate their own questions in response to the issues under discussion.

**Learning Goals**

This course is based on the principle of “Dual-Purpose Content,” in which the curriculum a) facilitates the acquisition of discipline-specific knowledge, and b) serves as a springboard for critical, analytical, and creative engagement with the world around us. To those ends, the goals of this course are:
1. To introduce students to the history, theory, and practice of theater/performance/protest aimed at social change.

2. To encourage students to apply their analytical, critical, and creative thinking skills to a range of cultural phenomena.

Learning Objectives

- Identify the historical development of “staged resistance,” beginning with the first-wave European avant-garde movements of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, through the present.

- Identify how class, race, gender, nationality, sexuality — among other identity markers — intersect with “staged resistance.”

- Analyze the ways in which “staged resistance” overlaps with and breaks from the aesthetics/techniques of traditional theater.

Learning Outcomes

- Construct coherent, analytical, critical written arguments that synthesize course concepts.

- Demonstrate close engagement with course readings and comprehension of course materials.

- Critically, analytically, and creatively engage with other students via discussions assignments.

- Incorporate course concepts into creative blog project.

Course Structure and Assignments

(Note: Assignments subject to change prior to beginning of semester)

The course is organized around weekly modules/case studies. Over the semester, the student will:

- Post one brief video introduction
• Complete a set of weekly readings
• Complete a weekly open-book quiz on the readings
• Complete one closed-book final exam
• Submit one blog project
• Participate in two HOWLROUND threaded discussions
• Participate in one In This Moment assignment

**Course Materials**

Each weekly module will contain a set of readings. These will include instructor commentary, plus additional readings from outside sources. Please see the "Plays and Book Info/Weekly Reading List" page in Course Essentials module for details.

**Grading**

The course grade is calculated according to the following percentages:

Blog Project: 30%
Discussions (2 total): 30% (15% each)
Weekly Quizzes (11 total): 16% (1.45% each)
Final Exam: 21%
In This Moment Assignment: 2%
Introduction Video: 1%

Grades are given a percentage and a letter grade according to the following standard Rutgers scale:

- 89.5-100 = A
- 74.5-79 = C+
- 59 and lower = F
- 84.5-89 = B+
- 69.5-74 = C
- 79.5-84 = B
- 59.5-69 = D
Course Outline  
(subject to change)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Module</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jan. 19-24</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jan. 25-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Feb. 1-7</td>
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Note: Please see the Assignment Rubrics page in the Course Essentials modules for further details.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Module</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Feb. 8-14 Week 4 Case Study - Feminist Performance: Politics, Process, and Parity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Feb. 15-21 Week 5 Case Study - Manufacturing Propaganda and Dissent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Feb. 22-28 Interlude One: Interlude - We See You White American Theater</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mar. 1-7 Week 7 Case Study - Popular Entertainment meets Revolutionary Film: <em>Sorry to Bother You</em> and <em>The Battle of Algiers</em> and</td>
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<td>Week</td>
<td>Module</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Mar. 8-14</td>
<td>Unit 2 Introduction - Radical Disruptions/Tactical Performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Mar. 15-21</td>
<td>SPRING BREAK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Mar. 22-28</td>
<td>Week 10 Case Study - Clandestine Insurgent Radical Clown Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Mar. 29-Apr. 4</td>
<td>Interlude Two - Theater and Climate Change</td>
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<td>Week</td>
<td>Module</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Unit 3 Introduction - Community Engaged Theater for Social Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Week 13 Case Study - Participation and Transformation: Collective Encounters &amp; <em>Farewell Welfare</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Week 14 Case Study - The Medea Project: Theater for Incarcerated Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Final Exam</td>
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*(subject to change)*