

Development of Theatre 4: American Theatre and Drama

THTR 4021 - Spring 2017 - Tuesday/Thursday 11am - 12:15pm

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The America Play - Suzan Lori Parks

A.R.T. Theatre

University of Colorado Boulder, Department of Theatre and Dance 2017

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Introduction

“to create theatre that is full of terror, beauty, love, and belief in the innate human potential for change.”

-Anne Bogart

William W. Lewis is a scholar, teacher, director, and performance collaborator who is passionate and curious about expanding and breaching the boundaries of performance through the integration of digital technologies as participatory tools. His research is focused on performance companies using alternative and devised forms of story telling that include site specificity, locative media, gaming, projection, and virtual reality. Will received an MA in Theatre History and Criticism from CUNY/Hunter College and a BFA in Performance with an emphasis in directing and performance art from the University of Memphis. He has been a member of the Attic Theatre Company in Los Angeles and First Look Theatre Company housed inside NYU's Department of Dramatic Writing, where he worked with many up and coming playwrights. He has also worked as an independent film and theatre practitioner in NYC, Los Angeles and regionally. Selected professional directing credits include *A Doll's House*, *Sight Unseen*, *The Dumbwaiter*, *Runaways*, and *All in the Timing*. Will recently wrote and directed an expressionistic adaption of Buchner's *Woyzeck* for CU centered around affect and reception theory that juxtaposed film, Internet technology and modern media influences with the live narrative. The production was a regional finalist at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival and a paper about the production focusing on the Implications of Interactive Performance for the iGeneration, will be published in *Theatre Topics* later this year.



Philosophy

I believe that the goal of good education is not necessarily for me to teach you exactly what I know but to act as a guide allowing you learn with me. I have as much to learn from you as you do from me. Each student has different needs and abilities and I will attempt to match my knowledge to fit your expectations. Each student will have varying levels of talent and intelligence but it is what you do with your given assets that count. Your curiosity, motivation and discipline to excel will ultimately determine all life outcomes. I expect you to come prepared and willing to ask questions about the work as well as how you interact with the world around you. I will do my best to encourage your curiosity and show you where to find the answers to your questions. The one greatest contribution I can give you will be to help you expand a deeply invested questioning spirit into the “truths” presented to you daily. I believe there are few wrong answers as long as you take the time and effort to think critically and consciously. We may not always agree in the class, but out of disagreement usually fruitful discussion results. Most importantly I believe the necessity of taking responsibility for your actions and being a thoughtful and respectful member of the world.

General Guidelines

Course Description

What does it mean to have American character? What are the traits, values and expectations that come with being an American in the past century and today? This course will introduce you to a plethora of American voices from the past 150 years, both dramatic and critical, attempting to answer these questions. In an effort to diversify the voices heard, we will engage with many plays/performances that fall outside the traditional “cannon” of American theatre and drama. By taking this path we will hopefully encounter new material and better understand a multitude of ways artists and scholars have attempted to define the American Dream, American Family, American Politics, and most important American Character.

Learning Outcomes

The Purpose of this course is to give you a better understanding of how American playwrights and theatre makers have reflected upon the social, political, religious, and economic realities of American life:

- Learn to clearly articulate observations and analysis of theatre and drama both orally and in writing.
- Develop critical thinking skills about advanced topics in dramaturgy and social theory.
- Develop professional and considerate skills at advanced argumentation in discussion settings
- Learn to express your creative energy through the articulation of specific directorial/design concepts.
- Hone your ability to engage in deep script analysis and creative engagement.

Expectations

This course will be largely discussion based. You are expected to have completed the assigned readings/viewings before class with the intention of engaging in lively debate about the material.

Some of the subject matter in this course may become controversial and emotional. You are expected to engage with the material in a sophisticated and critical manner. You will often disagree with your peers, which is expected, but through disagreement we often find the best ways forward. You will be asked to respond to your fellow classmates in both discussion forums online and in class, please do so in a considerate and constructive manner. I expect that each student come prepared to speak truthfully and respectfully so as to create a safe and supportive environment.

As an instructor, I do not find usefulness in tests as a measure of critical thinking skills. This means you will not have any tests or quizzes in this course. You will however be expected to complete weekly writing assignments and two class presentations. These assignments are intended to allow you to dive deep into the material introducing your peers to your opinions, insights and creativity.

You should come to class prepared and on time. Depending on the speed you read you should expect to spend 7-12 hours of work outside of class time.

Attendance Policy

Woody Allen once said that 80% of success is simply showing up. I tend to agree with this statement. As such, this class will have a strict attendance policy. **Each student is allowed 2 absences, it does not matter whether or not they are excused you only get to miss two class periods, after that your grade will drop to an immediate 80% (20% deduction) as the highest possible score. Any absences beyond 4 and you cannot pass the course.** Absences on your scheduled lecture days will not be allowed and will result in a 0 for that assignment. Each student is also allowed 2 tardinesses/leaving class early, after two each tardy/leaving class early will result in a 10% point final grade drop. A tardy is considered as arriving more than 5 minutes late.

Course Assignments

Readings/Viewings:

You are expected to come to each class prepared to discuss any reading assignments or videos detailed on your syllabus or assigned during class. Readings will come from plays and/or articles on the course D2L and Tome Webpage.

Required Purchases:

Theatre & Ethics - Nicholas Ridout - (Print) Amazon or Other Bookseller - ISBN: 978-0230210271

The Exonerated (Streaming) - Amazon

Curse of the Starving Class (Streaming) - Amazon

Fences (Streaming) - Amazon

Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (Streaming) - Amazon

Glengarry Glen Ross (Streaming) - Netflix

Sweat - Lynn Nottage (Print) Amazon or Other Bookseller

Weekly Readings:

An Introduction to American Character

Week 1

Critical/Historical:	Michael Walzer – What Does it Mean to be an American? Elinor Fuchs – Visit to a Small Planet Drama Amongst Democratic Nations - Alex de Tocqueville
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Artistic:	<i>Hamilton</i> (Soundtrack w/Tome)
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Week 2	Critical /Historical:	“Meta Melodrama” – Foster “Age, Race, Class and Sex” – Audre Lorde
	Artistic:	<i>Octaroon</i> - Dion Boucicault – 1859 <i>The Shipment</i> - Young Jean Lee – 2009 – (Streaming)
Week 3	Critical/Historical:	“The Other History of Intercultural Performance” - Coco Fusco “Performing Race” - Janelle Reinelt
	Artistic:	<i>Couple in the Cage</i> – Coco Fusco, Guillermo Gomez Pena 1992 – (Streaming) <i>Fires in Mirror</i> – Anna Deveare Smith - 1992 – (Streaming)

American Political Subjects

Week 4	Critical/Historical:	Theatre & Ethics - Ancient “One Third of a Nation” - Franklin D. Roosevelt
	Artistic:	<i>1/3 of a Nation</i> – Federal Theatre Project/Arthur Arent – 1938 <i>Waiting for Lefty</i> – Clifford Odets - 1935
Week 5	Critical/Historical:	“Violence, Mourning, Politics” - Judith Butler
	Artistic:	<i>Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo</i> – Rajiv Joseph - 2008 <i>Streamers</i> – David Rabe – 1977
Week 6	Critical/Historical:	“Politics and Culture” - Tony Kushner
	Artistic:	Angels in America: Millennium Approaches - 1993 (Stream or Read) <i>The Baltimore Waltz</i> – Paula Vogel - 1992

American Dreams and Explorations in Form

Week 7	Critical/Historical:	Theatre and Ethics - Modern Short Primer on Marxism
	Artistic:	<i>Glengarry Glen Ross</i> – 1984 – David Mamet - (Streaming)* <i>Slaughter City</i> – Naomi Wallace – 1996
Week 8	Critical Historical:	“Bodies of Evidence” – Carol Martin
	Artistic:	<i>The Exonerated</i> – Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen – 2002 - (Streaming)* <i>The Laramie Project</i> – Tectonic Theatre Project/Moises Kaufman 2000 (Streaming)
Week 9	Critical/Historical:	“Death of the Author” - Roland Barthes

Artistic: *The Emperor Jones* - Eugene O'Neil
The Emperor Jones – Wooster Group – 1992/1998 (Streaming)
The America Play – Suzan Lori Parks – 1993

Week 10

Critical/Historical: “What is an Author” - Michel Foucault

Artistic: *Machinal* - Sophie Treadwell – 1928
I Don't Have to Show You no Stinking Badges! – Luis Valdez - 1986

The American Family

Week 11

Critical/Historical: Theatre & Ethics - Postmodern

Artistic: *Curse of the Starving Class* – Sam Shepard – 1978 (Streaming)*
August Osage County – Tracy Letts - 2007 Critical/Historical:

Week 12

Critical/Historical: “Lesbian and Gay Drama” – Jill Dolan

Artistic: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* - Tennessee Williams - 1955 - (Streaming)
The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea - Cherie Moraga - 1995

Week 13

Critical/Historical: “Tragedy and the Common Man” – Arthur Miller

Artistic: *All My Sons* - Arthur Miller – 1947
Fences - August Wilson – (Streaming)* - 1983

Voices for a New Millennium

Week 14

Critical/Historical: Retraction” - This American Life Podcast

Artistic: *The Agony and Ecstasy of Steve Jobs V.2* - Mike Daisey 2012/14
Yellowface – Henry David Hwang - 2007/2010 - (Streaming)

Week 15

Critical/Historical: “Young Jean Lee’s Cruel Dramaturgy” – Patricia Ybarra
 Theatre & Ethics - Conclusion

Artistic: *Straight White Men* – Young Jean Lee - 2014
Sweat – Lynn Nottage - 2015*

Weekly Blog Posts

In order to gauge your investment and understanding of the weekly readings/viewings you are assigned a weekly 400-500 word blog post on the entire week's readings/viewings. You will be given a guiding question or statement for inspiration. You will post on the class Tome webpage. These posts can include images or links to video that help illuminate your reflections. **This post will be due on Monday morning of each week for the upcoming readings/viewings.** This means you will have to stay ahead on your assigned material, but this will also allow you to be prepared and invested in the material for in-class discussion.

You will be assigned to a group early in the second week and as a follow up to the blog post you will be required to respond to two of your group peer's posts by Friday each week.

These posts and responses will count for 40% of your grade. Grades are determined on a Check +(40), Check(30), Check - (20) basis. You are graded based on content and the ability express rigorous original thought. Posts are not due the weeks you present your Lecture Performance or Director's Concept. Each post is worth 40 points, meaning you may collect more than the total 400 points that make up the grade for this assignment (460 points possible - See Extra Credit).

Lecture Performance

In order to allow you creative freedom to express your critical understanding of the themes and impact of the material, you will give a 15 minute presentation to the class that reflects on one artistic reading in conversation with the critical reading(s) for the week. The presentation must engage with the critical material in some fashion. You should consider this presentation to be a mixture of creative practice and scholarly reflection. Remember the emphasis of your points of entry should be to ask "What is American Character?" and "How does this material reflect American Values?"

Examples might include:

- A short monologue from the script with a powerpoint/slideshow that connects the written material to a relevant historical or critical theme.
- A multimedia/video presentation in conjunction with a short academic reflection
- A collaborative exercise in design that helps explore a relevant theme or plot point.
- Leading the class through a game that expresses your understanding of the material.

These are only suggestions. You can come up with your own idea. You must confirm with me what you plan to present one week before your chosen date. The Lecture Performance is worth 20% of the final grade.

Director's Concept:

Your second presentation will consist of a fully realized Director's Concept for one of the readings/viewings of the week. You will create a digital presentation (PowerPoint / Keynote / Prezi) that walks the class through your concept as if you were presenting it to a theatre company who you wished to hire you.

The presentation should be 10-15 minutes long with 5-10 minutes allowed for follow up questions from the class. You will have a total of 20 minutes to present. You will be timed.

The presentation will focus on engaging with hands-on artistic choices. If you were asked to direct this play today, how would you do it? What would your creative choices be? Why would you make those choices? What would it look like? How would it sound?

You should have one central and defining production concept and draw upon research sources in order to explain and justify your choices. You will also explore some initial design phases. Include:

- A detailed, researched and supported *conceptual statement*.
- A description of the kind of *blocking/staging* you would use.
- Visuals as inspiration for *costumes, lighting* and *props*.
- A basic scale *floor plan* and rough *set rendering*.
- Examples of *sound* and *media* choices – will there be music or video/projections? If so, What kind?

You do NOT have to have artistic or technical skills for these visual elements, you may pull images, or include rough drawings. Plan your production for one of the theatres on the C.U. campus (UT, LOFT, IREY, ATLAS, ACTING STUDIO, MARY RIPPON) unless you have a specific reason for not using one of these (i.e. environmental, immersive, sight specific staging).

You must also email the slides from your presentation to me on the day you present. The Director's Concept is worth 20% of the final grade.

Final Portfolio

At the end of the semester you will return to your blog posts and create a final portfolio statement of 3000 words that sums up your answer to the question "What is American Character?" This final post should include a minimum of 5 different plays/performances or readings from the semester as examples. You should take time to rework/rewrite the posts, not just cut and paste. **The portfolio will be due one day before the scheduled final exam date.** During the exam we will discuss the final portfolios as a group. The final portfolio is worth 10% of the final grade.

Extra Credit

For extra credit you will be given opportunities to gain up to 80 points towards your total grade. Extra credit opportunities include a 500 word written response (20 points) to a live production that speaks to American Themes/Character and completing 3 extra blog posts (60 points).

Assessments

Activity	Number	Value	Max
Blog Posts	10	40 each	500
Performance Lecture	1	200	200
Director's Concept	1	200	200
Final Porfolio	1	100	100
Extra Credit	4	Outside Performance Paper 20 3 extra Blog Posts 20 each	80

Total Extra Credit**	1000 +80
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94 - Higher A

73-75 C

90-93 A-

70-72 C-

86-89 B+

66-69 D+

83-85 B

63-65 D

80-82 B-

60-62 D-

76-79 C+

59-Below F

Schedule

Date	Assignment/Reading Due	In Class Activity
T - Jan 17	"Visit to to a Small Planet"	Review Syllabus - Introductions

Date	Assignment/Reading Due	In Class Activity
TH - Jan 19	<i>Hamilton</i> What does it Mean to be American Drama Amongst Democratic Nations - Alex de Tocqueville	Discussion
F - Jan 20	Blog Post 1 - Due 7PM	NA
M - Jan 23	Blog Post 2 - Due 7PM	NA
T - Jan 24	"Meta Melodrama" <i>Octaroon</i>	Discussion
TH - Jan 26	"Age, Race, Class and Sex" <i>The Shipment</i>	Discussion
M - Jan 30	Blog Post 3 - Due 7PM	NA
T - Jan 31	"The Other History of Intercultural Performance" <i>Couple in the Cage</i>	Presentations/Discussion
TH - Feb 2	"Performing Race" <i>Fires in the Mirror</i>	Presentations/Discussion
M - Feb 6	Blog Post 4 - Due 7PM	NA
T - Feb 7	Theatre & Ethics - Ancient "Address to the Nation" <i>1/3 of a Nation</i>	Presentations/Discussion
TH- Feb 9	<i>Waiting for Lefty</i>	Presentations/Discussion
M - Feb 13	Blog Post 5 - Due 7PM	NA
T - Feb 14	"Violence, Mourning, Politics" <i>Streamers</i>	Presentations/Discussion
TH- Feb 16	<i>Bengal Tiger at the Bagdad Zoo</i>	Presentations/Discussion
M - Feb 20	Blog Post 6 - Due 7PM	NA
T - Feb 21	"Politics and Culture" <i>Angels in America: Millennium Approaches</i>	Presentations/Discussion

Date	Assignment/Reading Due	In Class Activity
TH- Feb 23	<i>The Baltimore Waltz</i>	Presentations/Discussion
M - Feb 27	Blog Post 7 - Due 7PM	NA
T - Feb 28	Theatre & Ethics - Modern <i>Glengarry Glen Ross</i>	Presentations/Discussion
TH- Mar 2	Notes on Marxism <i>Slaughter City</i>	Presentations/Discussion
M - Mar 6	Blog Post 8 - Due 7PM	NA
T - Mar 7	"Bodies of Evidence" <i>The Laramie Project</i>	Presentations/Discussion
TH - Mar 9	<i>The Exonerated</i>	Presentations/Discussion
M - Mar 13	Blog Post 9 - Due 7PM	NA
T - Mar 14	"Death of the Author" <i>The Emperor Jones</i> - O'Neill <i>The Emperor Jones</i> - Wooster Group	Presentations/Discussion
TH - Mar 16	<i>The America Play</i>	Presentations/Discussion
M - Mar 20	Blog Post 10 - Due 7PM	NA
T - Mar 21	"What is an Author" <i>Machinal</i>	Presentations/Discussion
TH - Mar 23	<i>I Don't Have to Show You no Stinking Badges!</i>	Presentations/Discussion
T - Mar 28	Spring Break	No Class
TH - Mar 30	Spring Break	No Class
M - April 3	Blog Post 11 - Due 7PM	NA
T - Apr 4	Theatre & Ethics - Postmodern <i>Curse of the Starving Class</i>	Presentations/Discussion

Date	Assignment/Reading Due	In Class Activity
TH - Apr 6	<i>August Osage County</i>	Presentations/Discussion
M - April 10	Blog Post 12 - Due 7PM	NA
T - April 11	"Lesbian and Gay Drama" <i>Cat on a Hot Tin Roof</i>	Presentations/Discussion
TH- April 13	<i>The Hungry Woman: A Mexican Medea</i>	Presentations/Discussion
M - April 17	Blog Post 13 - Due 7PM	NA
T - April 18	"Tragedy and the Common Man" <i>All My Sons</i>	Presentations/Discussion
TH- April 20	<i>Fences</i>	Presentations/Discussion
M - April 24	Blog Post 14 - Due 7PM	NA
T - April 25	"Retraction" - This American Life Podcast <i>The Agony and Ecstasy of Steve Jobs</i>	Presentations/Discussion
TH- April 27	<i>Yellowface</i>	Presentations/Discussion
M - May 1	Blog Post 15 - Due 7PM	NA
T - May 2	"Young Jean Lee's Cruel Dramaturgy" Theatre & Ethics - Conclusion <i>Straight White Men</i>	Presentations/Discussion
TH- May 5	<i>Sweat</i>	Presentations/Discussion
TBD	Final Portfolio	

This schedule is subject to change

University/Course Policies

HONOR CODE

All students of the University of Colorado Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. **Any violation of the honor code may cause you to fail the course.** All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). Other information on the Honor Code can be found at <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/honor.html> and at <http://honorcode.colorado.edu>.

CELLPHONE AND LAPTOP USAGE

Always be respectful of the abilities, opinions, focus and comfort of your fellow students. Please keep cell phones silenced and hidden from sight at all times while in the classroom. I encourage the use of laptops or tablets but ask that you do so only to engage in activities directly related to what is happening in the class at the moment, such as taking notes. Please full screen your word processor and turn off all notifications and alerts. If your device proves to be distracting for other students you will be asked to find an alternative method of taking notes.

POLICY ON DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT

The University of Colorado Boulder (CU-Boulder) is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working, and living environment. CU-Boulder will not tolerate acts of discrimination or harassment based upon Protected Classes or related retaliation against or by any employee or student. For purposes of this CU-Boulder policy, "Protected Classes" refers to race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. Individuals who believe they have been discriminated against should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Student Conduct (OSC) at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH, the above referenced policies, and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at <http://hr.colorado.edu/dh/>

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR A DISABILITY

If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit to your professor a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner (for exam accommodations provide your letter at least one week prior to the exam) so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations

based on documented disabilities. Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or by e-mail at dsinfo@colorado.edu. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see Temporary Medical Conditions: Injuries, Surgeries, and Illnesses guidelines under Quick Links at Disability Services website and discuss your needs with your professor.

ACCOMMODATIONS BECAUSE OF RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

It is the responsibility of every instructor to clearly explain his or her procedures about absences due to religious observances in the course syllabus so that all students are fully informed, in writing, near the beginning of each semester's classes. Campus policy regarding religious observances states that faculty must make reasonable accommodation for them and in so doing, be careful not to inhibit or penalize those students who are exercising their rights to religious observance. Faculty should be aware that a given religious holiday may be observed with very different levels of attentiveness by different members of the same religious group and thus may require careful consideration to the particulars of each individual case. See http://www.colorado.edu/policies/fac_relig.html. If you have questions about providing students with religious accommodations, please contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment at 303-492-2127. A comprehensive calendar of the religious holidays most commonly observed by CU-Boulder students is at <http://www.interfaithcalendar.org/>

CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, culture, religion, creed, politics, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression, age, disability, and nationalities. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. See policies at <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/classbehavior.html> and at http://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/code.html#student_code