HON 360    Spring 2014
Performing America(s): Creating, Celebrating, and Contesting Nationhood in U.S. Theatre and Popular Entertainment

CATALOG DESCRIPTION:
As a public platform, the stage has long been a site for expressing or challenging individual, national, or group identities. Students will examine primary materials including plays, vaudeville, minstrel, and circus entertainments from the nineteenth to twenty-first centuries, in conjunction with multidisciplinary critical and theoretical scholarship, to develop an understanding of the history of U.S. performance as a tool for political and social agency. (Offered as needed) 3 credits.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES:
- To acquire analytical vocabulary based on exposure to and discussion of varied stylistic, structural, and theoretical approaches to dramatic literature and performance
- To deploy this vocabulary to analyze and critique the structural and thematic content of diverse scripts and cultural performances
- To communicate critical interpretations of dramatic works through written analysis and research, creative projects, and oral presentations
- To engage in philosophical dialogue through creative work, presentations, writing, and class discussion

HONORS PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES:
Upon completing a course in the University Honors Program students will have:

a. Obtained a starting point for integrative exploration of the development of cultures and intellectual achievements through a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives;
b. Sharpened their ability to critically analyze and synthesize a broad range of knowledge through the study of primary texts and through engagement in active learning with fellow students, faculty, and texts (broadly understood);
c. Understood how to apply more integrative and interdisciplinary forms of understanding in the advancement of knowledge and in addressing complex challenges shaping the world;
d. Developed effective communication skills, specifically in the areas of written and oral exposition and analysis.

Honors Program Category: Human Sciences
Proposed GE Categories: Artistic Inquiry (AI), Social Inquiry (SI)
CONTENT:
Theatre and popular performance have long been sources of community building, political debate, personal expression, patriotism, and controversy. In this course we will examine how these cultural sites have created, contested, or celebrated the notion of national identity, and how they have contributed to our individual and collective understandings of “America.” We will analyze a variety of works themselves – including plays, minstrel shows, vaudeville sketches, national theatre experiments, Chautauqua speeches, and docudramas – from the nineteenth to twenty-first century. We will work to understand these pieces as products of their cultural moment and as part of our national legacy, while grappling with our reactions to them from our own particular historic moment. We will also work to understand the scholarly, critical, theoretical, and political conversations informing and surrounding these cultural artifacts through reading and discussing secondary scholarship and developing our own informed, critical responses to these materials.

CURRENT REQUIRED TEXTS:
The following play scripts are required reading and are available for purchase in the bookstore or online:

William Wells Brown, *The Escape, or Leap to Freedom* (1858)
Bertolt Brecht, *The Mother* (1932)
Luis Valdez, *Zoot Suit* (1979)
Ayad Akhtar, *Disgraced* (2013)

Additional assigned critical and theoretical readings are drawn from a variety of sources and will be accessible online or provided by the instructor via Blackboard. This bibliography includes:


**SPECIAL EVENTS:**

Students will attend the following two productions and develop written production responses to them based on course themes and a directed prompt from the instructor:

**Ayad Akhtar’s The Who & The What**, La Jolla Playhouse, February 11 - March 9: Raised in a conservative Muslim family in Atlanta, the outspoken and brilliant Zarina routinely clashes with her traditional father and sister. Zarina’s one outlet – her recently completed book about women and Islam – threatens to tear her family apart for good. With humor and ferocity, Ayad Akhtar’s *The Who & The What* examines the giant chasm between our traditions and our contemporary lives.

**Sophie Treadwell’s Machinal**, Chapman Theatre, April 10-12, 17-19: Trapped first in a dead-end job and then a loveless marriage, Helen longs for a bit of joy and tenderness that her harsh and male-dominated world cannot provide. Sophie Treadwell’s brilliant 1929 expressionistic play explores gender roles and the illusion of choice in contemporary society. With a large cast, integrated media and sonic score, this production is a post-modern examination of how suppression can drive an individual to commit desperate and horrible acts.

**INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES:**

- In class discussions
- In class individual and group creative exercises and presentations
- Reading, research, and written assignments
- Attendance at Chapman University and professional performances

**METHODS of EVALUATION:**

- Written assessments of written assignments and research projects
- Oral and written feedback on creative projects and research presentations
- In-class and written feedback on class participation, preparation, and engagement

**GRADING:**

- Participation: 20%
- Production Reviews (2 @ 10%) 20%
- Prompt Responses (10 @ 2%) 20%
- Final Research Project/Presentation 40%

TOTAL 100%
**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:**
Chapman University is a community of scholars that emphasizes the mutual responsibility of all members to seek knowledge honestly and in good faith. Students are responsible for doing their own work, and academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated anywhere in the university. For more information see: [http://www.chapman.edu/academics/academic-integrity/_files/academic-integrity-policy.pdf](http://www.chapman.edu/academics/academic-integrity/_files/academic-integrity-policy.pdf)

**DISABILITY SERVICES:**
In compliance with ADA guidelines, students who have any condition, either permanent or temporary, that might affect their ability to perform in this class are encouraged to inform the instructor at the beginning of the term. The University, through the Disability Services Office, will work with the appropriate faculty member who is asked to provide the accommodations for a student in determining what accommodations are suitable based on the documentation and the individual student needs. The granting of any accommodation will not be retroactive and cannot jeopardize the academic standards or the integrity of the course. For more information see: [http://www.chapman.edu/students/student-health-services/disability-services/index.aspx](http://www.chapman.edu/students/student-health-services/disability-services/index.aspx)

**EQUITY and DIVERSITY:**
Chapman University is committed to ensuring equality and valuing diversity. Students and professors are reminded to show respect at all times as outlined in Chapman’s Harassment and Discrimination Policy: [http://tinyurl.com/CUHarassment-Discrimination](http://tinyurl.com/CUHarassment-Discrimination). Any violations of this policy should be discussed with the professor, the Dean of Students and/or otherwise reported in accordance with this policy.

*Prepared by: Dr. Jocelyn L. Buckner*

*Last revised: 08/2013*