Course Description:
This course is designed to freely examine the intersections between African and African American Theater. It will study the origins, form and mission of Black Theater, tracing the commonalities in culture and performance. Using student-devised performances, the focus will be on how Theater intersects politics, culture and society in defining Black as a participatory presence in America. We will underscore the varied performative dimensions of blackness in Theater.

Theater is a means by which Blackness has interrogated and transmitted cultural identity, sometimes through political resistance. Students will therefore be exposed to seminal essays, topical plays and productions that will sharpen their critical, analytical and performative understanding of Black presence in culture and politics on the American stage and in global communities. They will be guided toward the performance of their individual artistic inventions – through drama, music, poetry, dance or a combination of forms in response to the conditions of blackness in African, American and world Theater. This semester, the focus will be on “Black Lives Matter” as a galvanizing theme for Black presence in America in the last three years.

The class will investigate through gathered stories, interviews and other references of Black presence and struggle in Carbondale, Carteville, Marion and Murphysboro. The goals are twofold: 1) A Class Theatrical performance and 2) Individual reports of personal role(s) and contributions to the project.

As a separate project, each student will have a topic of choice for investigation and presentation in class.

Course Objectives:
1. Examine the social implications of staging Black presence in America
2. Introduce students to African theater - its origins, forms and socio-cultural implications.
3. Introduce students to African-American theater – its origin, forms and socio-cultural implications
4. Understand the points of convergence between African and African-American Theaters
5. Develop the necessary critical and aesthetic contexts in forging the performance of African and African American presence on the American Stage
There are two classes in a week. The first class will be a study of pre-assigned texts examining specific periods, topics and or movements. The second class will be a laboratory dedicated to the research and rehearsals of the project. There will be a monthly review and general response to topical current and developing stories/experiences as we develop our performance scripts for our final presentations. Time will be set by the class to accommodate possible conflicts.

Sources:
Harry Elam and David Krasner: African American Theater: Performance and Theater History
Wole Soyinka: Myth Literature and The African World
Martin Banham, Errol Hill and George Woodyard: African and Caribbean Theater
W.B. Worthen: The Wadsworth Anthology of Drama

Essays: Not in any particular order

African Sources:
Ogunba Oyin, Traditional African Festival Theater
Soyinka Wole, The Fourth Stage: Through the Mysteries of Ogun
Osofisan Femi, “Ritual and Revolutionary Ethos” Okike, 22 (1982); pp 72-81

African American Sources:
Jones Leroi, The Revolutionary Theater
Neal Larry, The Black Arts Movement
Omi Osun Joni L. Jones, “Re-Presenting Blackness” Text and Performance Quarterly 32.3 (July 2012): 254-258
Brustein Robert, “Subsidized Separatism” American Theatre 13, 8; (Oct 1996); pg. 26
Wilson August, “The Ground on Which I stand”

Plays:
Lorraine Hansberry: A Raisin in the Sun
George C Wolf: The Colored Museum
Wole Soyinka: Death and the king’s Horseman
Athol Fugard : Zizwe Banzi Is Dead
Femi Osofisan: A Nightingale for W.E.B. DuBois; Morountodun
Leroi Jones: 1) Ducthman; 2) The Slave
August Wilson: 1) Fences; 2) Radio Golf
Matthew Lopez: The Whipping Man

Course Outline:
Week 1: AFRICA!
Overview: The Invention of Cultural Identities
African Theater: Origins and Forms
**Read for class Discussion:**
*Death and The King’s Horseman* by Wole Soyinka

**Week 2:**
Forms: Ritual Theater, Storytelling and Mask

**Class Review of:**
*The Fourth Stage: Through the mysteries of Ogun to the origin of Yoruba Tragedy* (Myth Literature and the African worldview)

**Week 3:**
African Theater: Colonialism, race retrieval and cultural self-apprehension.

Review and Discussion of *Death and The King’s Horseman* by Wole Soyinka

**Week 4:**
Post colonial realities and Theater in Africa

**Conclude readings and submit critical essay.**

**Week 5:**
Students’ project definitions and discussions

**Week 6:**
African American!

The Motion of History: The Black Stage reality in America

From slave songs to the Congo Square

**Week 7:**
Eyes on The Prize - Documentary Film on the Civil Rights Movement

**Week 8:**
The Black Arts Movement in America -

Read: *Performance, Neo-Orality and the Destruction of the ‘White Thing’* by Mike Sell

**Week 9:**
Project Updates

**Week 10**
The Black stage reality II: How shall the Negro be portrayed?

*The ground on which I stand* by August Wilson

**Week 11:**
*Toward a Revolutionary Theater* by Leroi Jones

Fences by August Wilson

**Week 12:**
Student Projects: Intersections II and Rehearsals

**Week 13:**
The Christian imperative versus African ritual realities in Wilson

**Week 14:**
Preview and rehearsals of student projects.

**Week 15:**
Exams – Final Presentations of Student-devised projects.

The following are guidelines for a successful learning experience:
Participation: While your physical presence in class is crucial, it does not substitute for an active participation in class work. Your progress as a student will be closely observed and will be a crucial part of your final grade. Final presentations will include all the elements of production to the extent possible. Performances will go on as scheduled on date and on time. Come one, come all!

Grading:
Class Work/exercises 20% - Attendance and contribution to Rehearsals
Critical Essay I 15%
Production Review 15%
Critical essay II 15%
Research Report 10%
Final Presentation 25%

Departmental Criteria for Grading:
A= Exceptional 90-100%
B= Above average 80-89%
C= Average 70-79%
D= Below average
F= Fail.

Grading Presentations:
F: Failure to show up the day a project is evaluated, lack of preparation, lack of responsibility to process and company.

D: Inadequate preparation, poor work.

C: Evidence of preparation.

B: Same as “C” grade plus dramaturgically coherent analysis and presentation, strong character interpretation, effective physical work, application of learned skills/tools.

A: Same as B plus Polished presentation – Clear and imaginative interpretation of play, well developed Characters and evidence of strong conceptual staging

Grading:
Attendance 10 points
Critical Essay 15 points
Production Review 10 Points
Africana aesthetics 10 Points
Quiz 10 Points
Final Performance “I Can't Breathe” 30 Points
Final Essay 15 Points
Departmental Criteria for Grading:

A= Exceptional 90-100%
B= Above average 80-89%
C= Average 70-79%
D= Below average
F= Fail.

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Professor Olusegun Ojewuyi.