

Editorial: E Pluribus Unum

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I'm so happy to know that flag flying is back in style. The horror across the way from the building where my office is located makes me want to fly a flag outside. The flag would be emblazoned with only one word: Shame. This way, anyone standing outside of Gould Plaza here at NYU would know how I feel. And they'd likely be outside of Gould Plaza rather than *on* the plaza as this hideous wall of shame (Figure 1) prevents access and blights the landscape. To be blunt: if you're arresting your students for peaceful protest, you're doing it wrong.

When we saw film of the students at Columbia University who barricaded themselves inside a building and were damaging property to protest is support of Gaza—at least you could make a case about public safety. But when NYU brought in the police to arrest protestors at the Gaza Solidarity Encampment, the situation was quite different.

"In the May 1 memo, [NYU President] Mills wrote that only 65 of the 133 individuals arrested at the plaza were affiliated with the university" (Nehme, 2024). *Only?* "Mills stated that hundreds of demonstrators on campus last Monday 'did not have permission to be



Figure 1: The wall of shame—a wooden wall constructed around Gould Plaza at NYU. Photo by the author.

at NYU’ and ‘significantly threatened’ the university community” (Nehme, 2024). As one of my students said, “A protest that doesn’t disrupt anything is just a gathering of friends.” And at NYU where most classes happen during the day, what of a protest outside a building complex that has multiple entries and exits after normal class hours—and certainly after office hours—when the buildings are largely vacant? *What were they disrupting? What were they threatening?* The wall was erected the day after, and as of this writing, it is now more than six weeks since these events unfolded, and the wall remains.

Another student said, “But they were chanting they supported Hamas.” To which I replied with some version of this:

We do have freedom of speech in this country. And even if the speech is hate speech, it is protected speech. I don’t agree with it. I don’t like it. But an academic institution is supposed to be invested in the development of student voice and choice, not the arbiter of what political speech they will tolerate. And while I know that some feel that hate speech makes them feel threatened and unsafe—to be clear, standing up New York City Police outside of every campus building and in and around Washington Square is a live threat. ANYTHING could happen, be that a real act or a perceived act, and no one would be safe from the police response.

My heart was pounding in my chest. The day after the wall was erected, I had back-to-back classes that evening in two different buildings (identified as '1' and '2' in Figure 2).



Figure 2: A map of NYU's Washington Square campus indicating author's class locations

The 'encampment' had relocated a few blocks south and there was a protest march heading southbound on Mercer Street, two blocks away. As I made my way around the corner (from '1' on the map) to get to the second class building ('2' on the map), there were police stationed everywhere. A student and I observed what appeared to be a bloodied protester being carried by a cadre of police officers along Washington Square East. I had been following the unfolding horrors in Israel and Gaza for seven months and stayed silent about it in my classes. *What was there to say?* But arresting students for protesting the university's investment was a bridge too far. Particularly given the outcry from right wing politicians that universities and colleges were not doing enough to quell the political speech of their students. *Yes, let's set the scene to reimagine Kent State for a new generation.*¹ And so I spoke up. But I

¹ "On May 4, 1970, members of the Ohio National Guard fired into a crowd of Kent State University demonstrators, killing four and wounding nine Kent State (cont.)

must reflect on the fact that the same fear is what kept me silent for all those months. That same fear is what instigated my tame comment in the last editorial for this publication, “That seemingly unlimited arms support will be given in furtherance of a humanitarian disaster” (Jones, 2023, vii)—milquetoast, at best. And I agonized over every word in that sentence. That’s what ‘they’ want. They want us to be careful. They want us to be silent. And that has to stop.

OF MANY, ONE

E pluribus unum. This motto of the United States was first suggested by a committee on July 4, 1776, and now appears on the country’s official seal (Smithsonian Institute).



Figure 3: The Great Seal of the United States (US Department of State, 2018)

students” (Lewis and Hensley, 1998). The students were protesting the expanding war in Vietnam, as the US invaded neighboring Cambodia.

And the motto has many layers of meaning. On one hand, it speaks to the federal system of disparate states conjoined under one federal government. On the other, it highlights this country as constituted largely of immigrant populations. And underpinning all of this is a diversity of perspectives, persuasions, cultures, and beliefs—united in one common cause. A democratic system that is designed to balance popular sentiment with protections for minority groups. And yet, we sort ourselves—divide ourselves politically in ways that sometimes seem to defy logic.

Below, I detail the most important issues facing the US as identified by tracking polls of US voters by *YouGov* (2024). The descriptions are my own.

Inflation/Prices

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, the economies across the Global North have struggled through work stoppages, supply-chain disruption, and global inflation. Here in the US, the public rates this highest among their political concerns—as if to say, “we want the government to control prices!” But that’s not the economic system we have here. The government does not control the price of goods—these are set by ‘market forces.’ Supply and demand, if you will. Or price-gouging, if you know (FTC, 2024). No matter. The liberal viewpoint seeks to reign in business in so far as the capitalist system will allow (though limited, not impossible). The conservative viewpoint is to let the market sort it out.

And yet, with a comparatively low inflation rate (as compared to other economies in the Global North), expanding GDP, and low unemployment, a *Wall Street Journal* survey of economists describes the US economy as “the envy of the world” (Goldfarb and DeBarros, 2024). While comparatively enviable, the cost of housing, food, goods, and services are too high—and yet, we consume and blame politicians for something that, in the system as currently constituted, is largely beyond their control.

Jobs and the Economy

For all my life, public polling shows that the US public trusts the Republican party more than the Democratic party when it comes to the economy. And yet, job growth has been larger under Democratic administrations (*The Economist*, 2024). The same is true for GDP growth—on average, better under Democratic administrations (Bivens, 2024). True for decades. And yet, *we believe*.

Immigration

According to Pew Research, “about three-quarters of Americans (73%) say increasing security along the U.S.-Mexico border to reduce illegal crossings should be a [...] goal for US immigration policy” (Oliphant and Cerda, 2022). Beyond that unified vision, the liberal viewpoint seeks to provide a path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants and expand access to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. The conservative viewpoint is mass deportation. And yet, there has been no meaningful immigration reform for nearly four decades.

Taxes and Government Spending

We want to pay no taxes. And we want roads, and bridges, and street lights, and police, and schools, and national parks, and prisons, and social security, and Medicare, and on and on and on. What we want is to end corruption. What we want is to stop waste. Last fall, in response to this litany, a student said, “What I want is to not have all of our money going to support the military industrial complex.” Touché. The liberal viewpoint seeks to make the wealthy and corporations pay their fair share. Tax and spend, some might say. The conservative viewpoint is to cut taxes for the wealthy and corporations. Starve the beast and prioritize privatization.

Climate Change

The liberal viewpoint seeks to expand access to renewable energy sources and support industrial innovation. The conservative viewpoint is ...

Elsewhere in the Global North, politicians debate how to confront (arguably) the single largest problem facing humanity. And in the US, it's a hoax. It's a natural phenomenon and we have no control over it. It's a global problem; why should our economy suffer when India and China...

The Supreme Court

...

I've been teaching public speaking for over a decade, and at the end of each semester, I impart some version of this guidance to students:

I don't care what side of the issues you find yourself, but there is NO QUESTION that the political parties have a different opinion on most of them. And in this imperfect system—this federation—our most vital act of speaking publicly is to vote. When chicken and fish are the options, you choose. And if your legal status is such that you can't choose, then you find people who can choose and you get them to the polls. And if you don't want chicken or fish, then you must step up and run for office yourself.

As American as apple pie is the notion that politicians are all the same. Political contests are often characterized as the lesser of two evils. The menu needs to be reimagined. But until then, chicken or fish are the options.

I am steeped in politics every day. And the behavior of politicians does not phase me. Some are desperate to better society. Others are out to make a buck. Charlatans abound. They don't phase me as they are artifacts of society at large, as they should be. What really gets at me is **us**. The voters. The ill-informed. The low-information voters. The tribalists. In October 2008, I was with a group of friends waiting at a pedestrian crossing when one said, "How many times do you have to hear that someone is a Muslim before you start to believe it?" I turned to her and said, "They can say it as many times as they want. It doesn't make it true. And even if it was true, what difference would that make?"

We must be informed. We must decipher the credibility of our sources. We must confront distrust and disengagement. As educators and artists, we have the tools—so we must spread the word.

As I highlighted at the outset of this editorial, there is a vested interest in promoting cynicism. To feel powerless. That there is nothing to be done. That if we speak up, they will shut us down. That both sides are the same and nothing changes. And yet I remind you that in 2017, control of the Virginia House of Delegates literally came down to a coin toss (Bump, 2017). Every vote matters.

And you don't need to digest politics on the regular. In an appearance on *The Michelangelo Signorile Show* in early May 2024, Mark Joseph Stern, senior writer for *Slate* on the courts and the law, paraphrased a tweet he'd authored a few years ago: "The supreme court has already ruined the country; that doesn't mean they should ruin your weekend too."



Mark Joseph Stern
@mjs_DC

...

My line on this is that the Supreme Court is already ruining the country; you shouldn't let it ruin your vacation too. Have a blast and delete this app!

9:59 AM · Aug 25, 2021

Figure 4: Mark Joseph Stern's August 25, 2021 tweet

Of many, one. We are all entitled to a weekend or vacation from politics, but we must engage. Choose your flag—rest assured that Martha-Ann Alito will choose hers (I'll leave you to find your own source)—and fly that flag. There's too much at stake.

IN THIS ISSUE

In this issue, our contributors document and reflect on innovative educational theatre practices for youth theatre and theatre for young audiences, in higher education, and research methodologies. **Sharon Counts** advocates for civic and community engagement programs as one prominent and effective method to foster synergy between communities and arts organizations. **Maddie N. Zdeblick** and **Noëlle GM Gibbs** investigate their dynamic use of creative drama to explore social justice in youth theatre. **James Woodhams** analyzes Back Alley Puppetry Parade performances during the COVID-19 pandemic to

document pivot-spaces and kinesthetic spectatorship. **David Overton** shares a heuristic and phenomenological self-study about the Long Island Classics Stage Company. On the higher education front, **Ellen Redling** proposes methods for enhancing critical thinking skills and ethical responsibility as revealed through two case studies. **Dermot Daly** uses a similar methodical approach, examining social justice and fringe theatre in higher education. Finally, **Nicholas Waxman** deconstructs the rise of theatrical inquiry as a research methodology in arts education, and **Brenda Burton** presents a literature review on the application of teaching and deep learning strategies for the drama-based instruction (DBI) practitioner and researcher.

LOOKING AHEAD

As we have recently concluded another thought-provoking dialogue at Amplify & Ignite, the 2024 Symposium on Research and Scholarship (presented in concert with the American Alliance for Theatre & Education/AATE), our next issue ([Volume 11, Issue 2](#)) will focus on articles that respond to or demonstrate a reimagining of research and scholarship in educational theatre. We invite submissions that will fall under one of the following frames:

- Researcher as artist
- Researcher as audience member
- Researcher as educator
- Expansive understandings of research and scholarship from emerging and seasoned scholars
- Decolonized and antiracist research and scholarship
- Innovative pieces that reimagine access, engagement, collaboration, and co-construction

We invite members of the Educational Theatre field to submit works that will share ideas, vocabularies, strategies, and techniques, centering on varying definitions and practices. That issue will publish in late 2024. Thereafter, look to the [Verbatim Performance Lab](#) for outreach and innovation from the NYU Steinhardt Program in Educational Theatre as well as the regional Leaders of Color Institute to be presented in collaboration with the American Alliance for Theatre

and Education in 2024.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

[Jonathan P. Jones](#), PhD is a graduate from the Program in Educational Theatre at New York University, where he earned both an M.A. and a Ph.D. He conducted his doctoral field research in fall 2013 and in spring of 2014 he completed his dissertation, *Drama Integration: Training Teachers to Use Process Drama in English Language Arts, Social Studies, and World Languages*. He received an additional M.A. in English at National University and his B.A. in Liberal Arts from NYU's Gallatin School of Individualized Study. Jonathan is certified to teach English 6-12 in the state of California, where he taught Theatre and English for five years at North Hollywood High School and was honored with The Inspirational Educator Award by Universal Studios in 2006. Currently, Jonathan is an administrator, faculty member, coordinator of doctoral studies, and student-teaching supervisor at NYU Steinhardt. He serves on the editorial board for *Applied Theatre Research* and *Youth Theatre Journal*, and on the board of directors as well as chair of Research and Scholarship for the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (AATE) where he has recently been elected Chair-Elect and will serve as Chair from 2025-2027.

Jonathan has conducted drama workshops in and around New York City, London, and Los Angeles in schools and prisons. As a performer, he has appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Town Hall, The Green Space, St. Patrick's Cathedral, The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, The Southbank Centre in London UK, and the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. Jonathan's directing credits include *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Julius Caesar*, *Elsewhere in Elsinore*, *Dorothy Rides the Rainbow*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, *The Laramie Project*, *Grease*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, and *West Side Story*. Assistant directing includes *Woyzeck* and *The Crucible*. As a performer, he has appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Town Hall, The Green Space, St. Patrick's Cathedral, The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, The Southbank Centre in London UK, Bord Gáis Energy Theatre in Dublin, and the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. Production credits include co-producing a staged-reading of a new musical, *The Throwbacks*, at the New York Musical Theatre Festival

and serving as assistant production manager and occasionally as stage director for the New York City Gay Men's Chorus, most recently directing *Quiet No More: A Celebration of Stonewall* at Carnegie Hall for World Pride, 2019.

At NYU, his courses have included Acting: Scene Study, American Musical Theatre: Background and Analysis, Assessment of Student Work in Drama, Development of Theatre and Drama I, Devising Educational Drama Programs and Curricula, Directing Youth Theatre, Drama across the Curriculum and Beyond, Drama in Education I, Drama in Education II, Dramatic Activities in the Secondary Drama Classroom, Methods of Conducting Creative Drama, Theory of Creative Drama, Seminar and Field Experience in Teaching Elementary Drama, Seminar and Field Experience in Teaching Secondary Drama, Shakespeare's Theatre, and World Drama. Early in his placement at NYU, Jonathan served as teaching assistant for American Musical Theatre: Background and Analysis, Seminar in Elementary Student Teaching, Theatre of Brecht and Beckett, and Theatre of Eugene O'Neill and worked as a course tutor and administrator for the study abroad program in London for three summers. He has supervised over 50 students in their student teaching placements in elementary and secondary schools in the New York City Area. Prior to becoming a teacher, Jonathan was an applicant services representative at NYU in the Graduate School of Arts and Science Enrollment Services Office for five years.

Recent publications include ["And So We Write": Reflective Practice in Ethnotheatre and Devised Theatre Projects](#) in *LEARNing Landscapes*, 14 (2), Let Them Speak: Devised Theatre as a Culturally Responsive Methodology for Secondary Students in [Routledge Companion to Theatre and Young People](#) (edited by Selina Busby, Charlene Rajendran, and Kelly Freebody; forthcoming), [Paradigms and Possibilities: A Festschrift in Honor of Philip Taylor](#) (2019), and Education at Roundabout: It's about Turning Classrooms into Theatres and the Theatre into a Classroom (with Jennifer DiBella and Mitch Mattson) in [Education and Theatres: Beyond the Four Walls](#) (edited by Michael Finneran and Michael Anderson; 2019). His book [Assessment in the Drama Classroom: A Culturally Responsive and Student-Centered Approach](#) was published by Routledge in winter 2023/24.

Recent speaking engagements include Communing with the Ancestors—a keynote lecture for Amplify & Ignite: A Symposium on

Research and Scholarship (AATE/NYU, 2024) and featured guest spots on Fluency with Dr. Durell Cooper Podcast, speaking about [Origins, Inspirations, and Aspirations](#), and Conversations in Social Justice Podcast, York St. John University, speaking about [Activism and Race within University Teaching and Research](#) (2021); panel moderation for AATE Leaders of Color Institute (We Will Not Be Erased: Combating Censorship and Book Bans in Theatre by, for, and about Youth, 2024 and [Cultivating Spaces for LOC in Educational and 'Professional' Theatre Settings - Opening Keynote with Daphnie Sicre and José Casas](#), 2022), invited workshops for AATE Theatre in Our Schools ([Reimagining Drama Curriculum: The Gradual Release of Responsibility Framework](#), [Locating Order in the Chaos: Revisiting Assessment in the Drama Classroom](#) and [Stage to Page: Reimagining the Teacher/Practitioner Role in Scholarship](#)) and the AATE National Conference ([Classroom Justice: Culturally Responsive, Student-Centered Assessment in the Drama Classroom](#) and [Pandemic Positives: What Do We Keep? Looking Backwards to Move Forward](#)); invited workshops for the 2024 NYC Arts in Education Roundtable ([Assessment in the Drama Classroom: A Student-Centered Approach](#)), LondonDrama, 2023 Dorothy Heathcote NOW conference in Aberdeen, Scotland (Assessment in the Drama Classroom; and co-facilitation with David Montgomery: *The Bear That Wasn't*: A Process Drama Investigating Identity and *The Last Book in the Universe*: A Process Drama Unpacking the Consequences of Book-Banning); an invited lecture on Performance as Activism at the Research-Based Theater Seminar, Washington, D.C. Citizen Diplomacy Fund Rapid Response COVID-19 Research-Based Theater Project, The COVID Monologues, part of the Citizen Diplomacy Action Fund for US Alumni Rapid Response made possible by the US Department of State and Partners of the Americas (2020); a keynote lecture on Drama and Education: Why and How for the Drama and Education Conference, Shanghai, China (2020); and an invited lecture, On Creativity, for the University of Anbar, Iraq (2020). Upcoming engagements include a workshop on Assessment in the Drama Classroom for the 2024 American Alliance for Theatre and Education Conference and as a roundtable discussion leader for the Educational Theatre Association's 2024 Conference.

In addition to his responsibilities at NYU, Jonathan teaches Fundamentals of Public Speaking, History of Theatre, and Introduction

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