

Editorial: Stay Woke

[JONATHAN P. JONES](#)

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

Now is the spring of our discontent
Made inglorious winter by the predilections of a dissatisfied
populace and the whims of their dear leader
And all the clouds that lour'd upon our house for two and half
centuries are firmly ensconced overhead with no clearing in
sight.

Not so long ago, progress seemed possible—that we could turn the proverbial page—but the past is always prologue and what is possible is never guaranteed.

Just a year ago, I shared with you the wall of shame that barricades the plaza across from my office (Jones, 2024, p. ii). And one year on, the wall remains. In his prescient, necessary text, *On Tyranny* (2017), American historian Timothy Snyder's first lesson for combating tyranny is not to obey in advance. "Most of the power of authoritarianism is freely given. In times like these, individuals think ahead about what a more oppressive government will want, and then

offer themselves without being asked” (p. 17). NYU’s reaction to on campus protests in 2023 and 2024 was to restrict access to all public, congregate spaces. At the time, this was partly done to prevent drawing congressional ire, as experienced by other colleges and universities across the US (Saul & Hartocollis, 2023). And as the current administration has gone further in penalizing institutions of higher education in the name of combating antisemitism, these spaces have remained closed here at NYU (as seen in Figures 1-4, photographed by this author on 4 June 2025)—all in service of preventing pro-Palestinian protests from having a site where they might develop on campus (WSN Editorial Board, 2024).



Figure 1: The wall of shame has a new coat of paint and slogan. Our future is indeed taking shape--and it is a dark one; photograph by this author.



Figure 2: The arcade-like entrance to the NYU Bobst Library is barricaded to restrict access. In the past, the arcade was sometimes a protest site; photograph by this author.



Figure 3: The main entrance to the Kimmel Center for Student Life has been adjusted to detour students and staff around the closed Grand Staircase. The staircase has been closed since October 2023 due to student protest activity (Lucas and Pisoni, 2024); photograph by this author.



Figure 4: Schwartz Plaza, a pedestrian thoroughfare that used to be open to the general public, is now barricaded, with access limited. Students and staff must show ID to NYU Public Safety officers to enter; photograph by this author.

I may be wrong, but I have long understood universities to be a site for the free exchange of ideas. And yet, these actions make me question that ideal. As does NYU's decision to withhold the diploma of Logan Rozos for using his graduation ceremony speech to speak out against the "genocide currently occurring" in Gaza (Chen, 2025).

At the outset of this editorial, I reimagined the opening to Shakespeare's *Richard III*, characterizing this political and social moment as the 'spring of our discontent' —so-called spring to capture my sentiment that the worst is yet to come. And in this perilous moment for the free exchange of ideas—particularly 'woke ideas,' I wonder, should we be cowed into submission? Should we obey in advance? Or might there be another path to follow?

HUSH HARBORS

While drafting this editorial, I attended a book talk by former US Attorney Barbara McQuade in conversation with former Attorney General Loretta Lynch, speaking about the social and political implications of disinformation and misinformation. After an introduction that delineated a number of the court cases where the president's

many executive orders or budget cuts have been struck down (either temporarily or permanently), AG Lynch commented, “All of these cases are evidence of a people who are not giving up.” Of these various judicial cases, attorneys general from a variety of states brought suit to stop some of these orders from going into effect (Chen, 2025; Meko and Closson, 2025, Mar. 13; Meko and Closson, 2025, Apr. 10; Weiser and Miller, 2025, May 28; Willingham, 2025; et al). And as these officials are charged with engaging in these judicial fights, their work is always in the public sphere. But for private citizens, there are other routes to preserving political struggles—and rather than obeying in advance, a little history might illuminate a path to maintain political struggle outside of the public sphere.

Hush harbors were sacred space for enslaved African Americans in the antebellum south. The enslaved gathered initially to maintain their ancestral faith, but eventually to develop their own form of Christian worship outside of the prying eyes of their masters. A formerly enslaved man, Simon Brown, described these spaces as ones in which,

They cherished meetings of their own where they could relax and enjoy the form of worship that pleased them and uplifted their spirits. ... they would steal away into the woods and meet in what they called the invisible church, or the hush harbor, where they constructed meeting places made from the branches of trees ... there was no pretending in those prayer meetings. There was a living faith in a just God Who would one day answer the cries of His poor black children and deliver them from their enemies. (cited in Erskine, 2014, p. 133)

The conversations in these hush harbors were not limited to religious practices. Nunley (2007) notes, “Hush harbor spaces enabled enslaved Africans in America to address secular as well as sacred concerns” (p. 226). And more than just conversations, these spaces provided participants with opportunities to collectively organize. Nunley continues, “Formal institutions such as the National Colored Woman’s Association, the Black Panthers, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference all emerged from sequestered or hidden Black public spheres of African American hush harbors” (p. 227). The underground railroad was underground for a reason—and in its

seclusion, it was highly effective. So who knows what might develop from obscured political discourse provided that the discourse continues.

Educational theatre often prioritizes the experience of the participants moving through a process over that of an external audience who views a product. Process is rarely public, and as such, we know well the power of what can happen in an educational and/or artistic space behind a closed door. So let us never lose sight of the power of our practice. As James Baldwin has advised, “For this is your home, my friend, do not be driven from it; great men have done great things here, and will again, and we can make America what it must become” (Baldwin, 1962, p. 294). And until we achieve that progress, let us have all hands on deck—working both in public and in private to move us ever forward.

STAYING WOKE

In my editorial two years ago, I implored our readers to “Get woke” — and in response to the question *what does it look like to be woke in the classroom*, I advised:

It is not about espousing a political ideology. Rather, it tasks you with creating a learning community that is grounded in liberation, equity, and justice. Woke in the classroom requires self-reflection. It requires you to consider your privilege before you speak—be that due to your race, gender, ethnicity, sexual-orientation, or otherwise. It requires you to promote inquiry and critical consciousness. Woke in the classroom is where students know that you support them when the world outside seeks to oppress them. (Jones, 2023, pp. vi-vii)

Since that writing, today’s political climate insists that ‘woke’ is wrong—that the activists went too far. American business leaders found themselves up against a workforce that demanded equity and justice in the workplace—a workforce who vocally identified threads of racism, colonialism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and implicit and explicit bias in the workplace. And in retaliation, those business leaders now offer public support for the presidential administration—they say they can breathe a sigh of relief as they champion the end to diversity, equity, and inclusion—DEI (Bennet, 2024). And in our work with young

people and in community, we must reject that. Liberation must always be our goal and we must endeavor—whether in public or in private—to do what we can to achieve that.

And what will that look like today? In truth, our liberatory toolkit remains—albeit more necessary now. Recall my action steps I proposed in 2023:

That doesn't mean you need to organize a protest (though you could). It doesn't mean you need to take to the streets (though you could[...]). It doesn't mean you have to make public comment at your local school board meeting (though you could). The teacher who keeps a drawer full of emergency snacks for students they know are missing meals when the conservatives cut funding is doing their part. And if, like me, you worry after that you didn't do enough—let that push you to do more the next time. They want you to be pacified. They want you to be cowed into silence. They want you asleep. (p. xiii)

As illustrated in the closing tableau of Beyoncé's Cowboy Carter tour (Figure 5), a silent protest can be quite effective in highlighting endangered public speech. Let us make room for all manner of activism in this moment, and let us strive for possibility. French political activist Frank Barat offers encouraging words for political struggle, "That seemingly indestructible forces can be, thanks to people's will-power, sacrifices, and actions, easily broken" (2016, xii). We will move ever forward—but let's not kid ourselves—the brutality of oppressive summer is coming. And in light of this, I implore you: stay woke!



Figure 5: At Beyoncé's Cowboy Carter World Tour, the Statue of Liberty is shown with a mask covering her mouth; photograph by this author.

IN THIS ISSUE

In this issue, our contributors thoughtfully examine educational theatre practices, offering reflections and documentation of creative practices that are shaping the field. **Samantha Briggs** and **Marissa Barnathan** explore how they combined methods from participatory democracy, futures studies, and Boal's Legislative Theatre to create a multi-step audience engagement process consisting of pre-production, post-show, and post-production workshops aimed at collectively strategizing methods for preventing gun violence. **Aghogho Lucky Imiti** contends that Theatre Arts as a professional discipline in the humanities should be regarded as other disciplines, and its graduates be given equal opportunities as their counterparts from other fields in Nigeria. **Rosalind M. Flynn** analyzes embodied learning, using physical

theatre activities to support the learning of vocabulary words. Finally, **Dave Humphreys** shows how carefully structured and targeted drama games can benefit learners' experiences and support teachers in understanding a dramatic pedagogical approach.

LOOKING AHEAD

Our next issue (Volume 12, Issue 2) looks to engage members of the global Educational Theatre community in dialogue around current research and practice. 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-2025. Thereafter, look to the [Verbatim Performance Lab](#) for outreach and innovation from the NYU Steinhardt Program in Educational Theatre.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Jones, J. P. (2025). Editorial: Stay Woke. *ArtsPraxis*, 12 (1), pp. i-xiii.

REFERENCES

- Baldwin, J. (1962, Dec.). A letter to my nephew. In: *Baldwin: Collected essays*. New York: The Library of America.
- Barat, F. (2016). Introduction. In: Davis, A. *Freedom is a constant struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the foundations of a movement*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Bennett, E. (2024, Jan. 11). [US business leaders are pushing back against years of corporate diversity efforts](#). *BBC News*.
- Chen, A. (2025, May 16). [NYU withholds diploma of Gallatin graduate who condemned 'genocide currently occurring' in Gaza](#). *Washington Square News*.
- Chen, D. (2025, May 13). [20 states sue Trump over immigration demands and threats to cut funding](#). *The New York Times*.
- Erskine, N. L. (2014). *Plantation church: How African American religion was born in Caribbean slavery*. Oxford University Press.
- Jones, J. P. (2023). Editorial: Get woke. *ArtsPraxis*, 10 (1), i-xix.

- Jones, J. P. (2024). [Editorial: E pluribus unum](#). *ArtsPraxis*, 11 (1), i-xiv.
- Lucas, G., and Pisoni, H. (2024). [NYU says Kimmel stairs closed due to 'protest activity'](#). *Washington Square News*.
- Meko, H., and Closson, T. (2025, Mar. 13). [Democratic attorneys general sue over gutting of Education Department](#). *The New York Times*.
- Meko, H., and Closson, T. (2025, Apr. 10). [Attorneys general sue over access to \\$1 billion in federal school aid](#). *The New York Times*.
- Nunley, V.L. (2007). From the harbor to da academic hood: Hush harbors and an African American rhetorical tradition. In: Richardson, E.B., and Jackson, R.L. *African American rhetoric(s): Interdisciplinary perspectives*. Southern Illinois University Press.
- Saul, S., and Hartocollis, A. (2023, Dec. 6). [College presidents under fire after dodging questions about antisemitism](#). *The New York Times*.
- Snyder, T. (2017). *On tyranny: Twenty lessons from the twentieth century*. New York: Crown.
- WSN Editorial Board. (2024, Sept. 26). [Editorial: NYU is stifling protest in an attempt to control its image](#). *Washington Square News*.
- Wesier, B., and Miller, K. (2025, May 28). [16 states sue Trump over \\$1.4 billion in science cuts](#). *The New York Times*.
- Willingham, L. (2025, Jun. 6). [Lawsuit from state attorneys general challenges Trump's executive order on election overhaul](#). *PBS News*.

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 currently an administrator 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 serves as Board Chair, 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, Jonathan previously served the Program in Educational Theatre as faculty member, coordinator of doctoral studies, and student-teaching supervisor. His courses 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. Jonathan was awarded the Steinhardt Teaching Excellence Award in 2025.

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 [Discoveries beyond the Lesson Plan: A 'How to'](#) (with David T. Montgomery) in *Education in the North*, 31 (2), ["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 *Establishing Communities of Practice among Pre-Service Drama Teachers: Revisiting Learning to Teach Drama: A Case Narrative Approach*, EdTA Teacher Education Conference: Building CommUNITY, Minneapolis, MN (2024) and *Amplify & Ignite: Creative Practice in and With Communities*, Emerson College, Boston (2025); *Assessment in the Drama Classroom: A Culturally Responsive and Student-Centered Approach*, AATE National Conference: Rooting Change, Chicago, IL (2024), *Face to Face 2024: NYC Arts In Education Roundtable Virtual Conference* (2024), and *EDTA Connected Arts Network* (2025); *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 workshops on Developing Communities of Practice among Theatre Educators for IDIERI 11 in Vancouver and the 2025 American Alliance for Theatre and Education Conference. He will also present selections from *Communing with the Ancestors* at the IDIERI Conference.

In addition to his responsibilities at NYU, Jonathan teaches Fundamentals of Public Speaking, History of Theatre, and Introduction to Theatre at CUNY: Borough of Manhattan Community College.