Course Description: This course offers a survey of political theater, and of the use of theatrical elements in practical politics, from the ancient Greeks to the present. How have dramatic depictions of politics changed over time? In what ways have political plays been used to advance political agendas, both by the powerful and by dissidents and protest movements? To what extent can we understand political speeches and political campaigns as essentially theatrical productions? This course offers an interdisciplinary perspective on these questions. In a typical week, students will read one or more full-length plays accompanied by appropriate readings from political science, political philosophy, or social psychology. Through these readings, writing assignments, and class discussion, students will learn about the development of different dramatic techniques and forms through the history of theater, about the co-evolving relationship between politically-themed spectacles and changing ideas about citizenship and political legitimacy, and about the political psychology of speeches and campaign techniques.

Course Prerequisites: There are no prerequisites for this course.

Course Requirements: Your course grade will be determined by a combination of the following factors: (1) three short writing assignments, (each of these comprising 15% of the overall grade); (2) a final writing assignment (40%); (3) and class participation (15%).

There will be three short writing assignments (approx. 3 pages each) over the course of the semester. Prompts will be distributed at the appropriate times. See the end of this syllabus for the short writing assignment due dates.

The final writing assignment will be a more substantial piece of work. Subject to approval from the instructor, the final writing assignment may take the form of an essay, a proposal for a political science research study, or an original politically-themed short play written by the student. Students are required to submit a one-page memo describing their proposed project, and the proposed format, for approval by the instructor no later than 15 November 2018. The appropriate length of the final writing assignment will vary depending on the form of the work submitted; guidance and feedback will be given on a case-by-case basis.

Finally, class participation is essential to the learning process in small, discussion-based seminars. Your insights help other students learn; failure to participate in discussions is a failure to contribute to an important common good. Students are expected to keep up with each week’s assigned readings, to consider them carefully, and to be prepared to contribute thoughtfully to class conversations. Students who seldom participate in class discussions will be assumed not to be keeping up with the reading, and cannot expect to get a strong grade in the class. Additionally, the instructor will keep track of attendance; a significant number of unexcused absences may be grounds for failing the class.
Course Books & Readings: The course involves a significant number of required texts, which will be available from the NYU Bookstore. I will do my best to get copies placed on reserve at the NYU Library as well, where possible.

- Rich Orloff, *Chatting With the Tea Party*. To be distributed in class.

In addition, a number of supplementary readings will be available on the internet, through library.nyu.edu - instructions for accessing these readings will be provided in class. These supplementary readings may occasionally contain technical material (such as statistical analysis) that goes over your head – that is absolutely fine, and to be expected. The point of these readings is to glean the main ideas and get a window into how political scientists and psychologists study aspects of the social world. Just read these materials and get what you can from them, and you will be fine (and the instructor will talk you through anything that needs to be talked through in class.)
Course Outline

Week 1 (8 September 2020): Introduction

Week 2 (15 September 2020): Ancient Tragedy / Political Legitimacy
Sophocles, *Antigone* (441 BCE) [74 pp]
Jean Anouilh, *Antigone* (1944) [61 pp]

Week 3 (22 September 2020): Elizabethan Drama / The Exercise of Power
William Shakespeare, *Henry V* (1599) [192 pp]
Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1532) [selected sections only, around 40 pp]

Week 4 (29 September 2020): Social Realism / Self-Serving Perception
Henrik Ibsen, *Ghosts* (1881) [84 pp]
Henrik Ibsen, *A Public Enemy* (1882) [117 pp]

Week 5 (6 October 2020): Realist Drama / Dirty Hands & Agenda Control
Maxwell Anderson, *Both Your Houses* (1933) [180pp]

Week 6 (13 October 2020): Agitprop / Political Mobilization
Clifford Odets, *Waiting for Lefty* (1935) [31 pp]
Clifford Odets, *Golden Boy* (1937) [88 pp]

Week 7 (20 October 2020): Epic Theater / Malfeasance in War
Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1938) [88 pp]

Week 8 (27 October 2020): Theater of the Absurd / Political Psychology of Oppression
Vaclav Havel, *The Memorandum* (1965) [78 pp]

Week 9 (3 November 2020): The Interventionist Strain / Postcolonialism and Feminism
Caryl Churchill, *Cloud Nine* (1979) [87 pp]
Online Politics Reading TBA

Week 10 (10 November 2020): Magical Realism / Identities and Prejudices
Week 11 (17 November 2020): Documentary Theater / Politics and the Media
David Hare, *Via Dolorosa* (1998) [43 pp]
Rich Orloff, *Chatting with the Tea Party* (2016) – to be distributed in class

Week 12 (24 November 2020): Contemporary Theater 1 / The Effects of History on the Present
Suzan-Lori Parks, *Father Comes Home From the Wars, Parts 1, 2 & 3* (2014) [159 pp]

Week 13 (1 December 2020): Contemporary Theater 2 / Conformity & Obedience

Week 14 (8 December 2020): Contemporary Theater 3 / Working-Class America
Lynn Nottage, *Sweat* (2016) [112 pp]

*All Assignments to be submitted via the NYU Classes online system by 5pm on the relevant dates*

**Short Writing Assignment 1:** due Thursday, 1 October

**Short Writing Assignment 2:** due Thursday, 22 October

**Short Writing Assignment 3:** due Thursday, 12 November

1 Page Memo on your final paper idea: due Monday, 16 November

**Final Paper:** due Monday, 14 December