



Contemporary American Theatre and Social Change
Elective Course, Spring 2026
Lect. dr. Diana Benea, diana.benea@lils.unibuc.ro

Overview

From Broadway musicals to documentary theatre and multimedia works, this course explores the richness of contemporary American theatre as a platform for critical reflection on some of the most pressing social and political issues of our time. Students will examine how theatre represents historically marginalized identities, interrogates power structures, and shapes public discourse on questions of social justice and citizenship. Through the lens of a cultural studies perspective, the course invites students to discover theatre as a collaborative, socially engaged practice and a vehicle for civic engagement.

Major Aims

- to cultivate an understanding of theatre as a performative medium, with a focus on how production elements (stage design, lighting, movement, music, multimedia, etc.) enhance storytelling and shape audience experience.
- to engage with a wide range of genres and environments (Broadway, off- and off-off-Broadway, regional theatre, etc.) that reflect the diversity of contemporary theatre in the United States.
- to analyze a selection of plays by influential theatre artists (Lin-Manuel Miranda, Quiara Alegría Hudes, Ping Chong and Company, Anna Deavere Smith, Heidi Schreck) against the backdrop of broader cultural, political, and societal debates.
- to develop skills in applying a cultural studies toolkit to theatre, moving beyond text-based approaches.

Course Materials

Full recordings of theatre productions, scripts, critical essays, and audience questionnaires.

Format

The course combines mini-lectures with guided discussions based on excerpts from theatre productions and relevant secondary sources.

Assessment

Assessment consists of active and informed participation in class discussions (1/3 of the final grade) and an end-of-term written exam (2/3 of the final grade).

Production photos (from left to right): Lin-Manuel Miranda and Quiara Alegría Hudes' *In the Heights*, 2008 (credits: Joan Marcus); Heidi Schreck's *What the Constitution Means to Me*, 2019 (credits: Joan Marcus); Ping Chong and Company's *Alaxxa/Alaska*, 2017 (credits: Adam Nadel).