

**CALREP
Presents**

**NOV 3 - NOV 12
CALREP.ORG**

CSUB Studio Theatre
Individuals: \$20
CSUB ID: \$15
Seniors & Military: \$17

devised by THE ENSEMBLE
conceived & directed by JOANNE GORDON

**featuring
ALEXANDRA BILLINGS**

**WOKEL:
A REVOLUTIONARY
CABARET**

Part of the
Devising
Democracy
Series

AUDIENCE GUIDE

WOKE!: A Revolutionary Cabaret

Devised by THE ENSEMBLE

Define: Devised-

1. Dictionary.com

to contrive, plan, or elaborate; invent from existing principles or ideas

2. Meriam Webster

transitive verb

a. to form in the mind by new combinations or applications of ideas or principles :invent devise a new strategy

Define: Woke-

1. Merriam-Webster

chiefly US slang

woker; wokest

Aware of and actively attentive to important facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice)

2. Dictionary.com

verb

a simple past tense of wake.

3. English Oxford Living Dictionaries

US

informal

Alert to injustice in society, especially racism.

‘we need to stay angry, and stay woke’

4. Urban Dictionary

A state of perceived intellectual superiority one gains by reading The Huffington Post.

Ali is so woke. At brunch she explained how wearing anything other than Chuck Taylor's or Tom's is really a microaggression. Hey did you get your Amy Schumer tickets yet?

5. Proposed Definition for *Woke!: A Revolutionary Cabaret*

noun- a state of awareness to be achieved after careful examination of the human condition through observation, listening, conversations, and study. While we strive to “get woke”, it takes work to “stay woke”. Being “woke” is not about superiority but generosity. The generosity required to hear someone else’s experience and see the person behind the issue.

Woke!: A Revolutionary Cabaret showcases student voices, exposing the concerns that they have for themselves, their families, their friends, and the world.

Woke!: A Revolutionary Cabaret invites you, the audience, to:

- hear these voices
- think about ways that you can connect to other people
- take action

ADVISORY

The language in *Woke!: A Revolutionary Cabaret* comes from the student performers and public sources.

Because it is drawn from real people and their real experiences, the work is honest, raw, and sometimes difficult to hear.

The text may or may not be spoken by the people who wrote it.

We understand that the rawness might be difficult for some people as issues of family, addiction, assault, and hateful speech may bring up difficult feelings.

We hope that you will stay with us, but we understand if you feel that it is too much. Whatever your response, please know that you are not alone.

And if you are feeling overwhelmed, seek help. Support is available here on campus and elsewhere in the community.

What Does “Woke” Mean? There’s More to The Slang Term Than You Think

By MADDY FOLEY Jan 11 2016

<https://www.bustle.com/articles/134893-what-does-woke-mean-theres-more-to-the-slang-term-than-you-think>

Unless you've been living under a rock (or just very much removed from social media, in which case, I applaud you for going to a place I never will), then the concept of "woke" being used as an adjective is not a particularly new thing for you. As in, "stay woke." You've seen that phraseology floating around, I'm sure. But what does "woke" mean, specifically, when used in that form? I can already hear the Baby Boomers grumbling about the future of the English language, but honestly, they're the reason we pepper our sentences with extra "likes." They can, like, go grumble elsewhere.

According to Dictionary.com, "woke" is the past tense of "wake" — as in, someone who is past the process of waking up. They're done with it. They've moved on. They've evolved from, you know, being asleep and hitting the snooze button 15 times. And frankly, that's a pretty accurate description of how "woke" is currently being used as an adjective.

Urban Dictionary defines "woke" as being aware, and "knowing what's going on in the community." It also mentions its specific ties to racism and social injustice. To use "woke" accurately in a sentence, one that captures its connotations and nuances, you'd need to reference someone who is thinking for themselves, who sees the ways in which racism, sexism and classism affect how we lives our lives on a daily basis. Or, alternatively, someone who doesn't. In which case:

The rise in popularity of "woke" has been tied to the #BlackLivesMatter movement, which initially surfaced in 2013 following the death of Trayvon Martin. #StayWoke often accompanied social media posts about police brutality, systematic racism and the industrial prison complex. #StayWoke reminds readers to look past the provided narrative, to examine their own privilege (or lack thereof). #StayWoke reminds readers that there is more than one reality to life in the United States.

The actual phrasing of "woke," it should be mentioned, has been floating around black social media circles for years. It's not the first AAVE word to be taken up by the greater public ("bae" and "twerk" and "trap queen" are just a few), and it certainly won't be the last. If you are interested in a detailed timeline that charts the full evolution of "woke" from its first pop culture mention to its use today, I'd highly suggest checking out this article by Charles Pulliam-Moore. It's fascinating.

Erykah Badu first used "stay woke" in her 2008 song Master Teacher, and by 2011 the phrase had begun to gain popularity as a way of describing an informed, questioning, self-educating individual, which is essentially how we use it today.

Four years after the death of Trayvon Martin, "woke" is on MTV's Top 10 Teen Slang Words for 2016. BuzzFeed just published an article about everybody's favorite woke bae, Matt McGorry (a must-read, tbh). You can take quizzes to test how woke you are and Twitter now urges you to #StayWoke about everything from fast food conspiracy theories to ridesharing price surges. That's fine. I took those quizzes, and I love Matt McGorry, who is both woke and bae. But just remember the roots of "woke" when you use it, because embodies a lot more than just a "grammatically incorrect" hashtag.

Interview with Director Joanne Gordon

What is the inspiration for *WOKE!: A Revolutionary Cabaret*?

Like Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert and Jimmy Kimmel I can thank Trump in many ways that was the beginning. It was like watching a horrible accident happen that you don't think is going to happen and then it does and then dealing with the consequences of each week bringing a fresh affront to my sense of morality to my commitment to my adopted country. Most of all to hearing the students and giving them a platform on which to express their indignation, their passion, their patriotism and their love, all those things.

Through conversations with students did you start to realize they needed an outlet?

Oh absolutely, no question, I can't teach without living in the reality of which I'm in. The interesting thing about *WOKE!* is that it started with a very political slant and has evolved into a much more personal thing than I ever would have imagined and in many ways, the political became the personal. Talking about issues in the country turned lead us into issues in the family lead us into issues about relationships so the piece has become a much more gentler, softer, more poignant, more honest awakening than the initial satiric and political piece I imagined.

What does being WOKE mean to you? How does the play achieve this?

The word first came to me when I was directing *Disgraced* in Palm Springs, I was living with my two actresses one who was a very politically active African American woman and we were talking about some horror that occurred the day before and the African American actress turned around and said to me, "Joanne you're woke." And me being an almost 70-year-old white woman I asked, "What does that mean?" and when she explained that it meant 'to be politically sensitive and aware' it seemed to be such an extraordinary good thing to be and I was deeply complemented by the fact that she had bestowed what was essentially an African-American term on me in an honorary fashion. When we decided to make this piece, it had various names all which became dated, it started with resist which became too easy and really belonged to Hamilton. So, it evolved into persist which came out of the Elizabeth Warren, "nevertheless she persisted" and then suddenly it came to me that the best thing I wanted was WOKE which was let us all be alive to and aware of an eloquent about, what is going on around us.

Who wrote the script for *WOKE*?

It was all written by the students, I collected a huge amount of community stuff, published stuff. But I haven't been able to use all of it because the students have so much to say and it is all the students work.

So, the students are the ones that are showing what it means to be WOKE?

The students are giving expression to their wokeness, they are saying, "We are woke, be woke too, join us in this state"

What was the process for creating *WOKE*? You started with workshops?

The workshops I came in and shared, over the summer I said to the students send me whatever you like and the student sent me sent me YouTube videos, newspaper articles, magazine articles, internet articles, songs, lots of songs and poems and I got stuff from alums as well at that stage, and I shared with

everybody so everybody was getting the same material. Then we came and talked a lot, and then the personal stuff started coming out. The more one person wrote about, say an absentee father, somebody else had to write about an absentee father then somebody else had to write about gender issues and as one would give in it would stimulate everyone else to write and that's how that happened.

As a director being that outside eye, how do you go about organizing this information, putting it together and deciding where it goes in the piece?

If I'm going to say in all humility, it's what I'm really good at because I've done it a lot. I've done it with all Bukowski's work I've done it was Sondheim's work three times, Bukowski 4 times I've worked with the poet Jimmy Santiago Baca I've done it here with a piece called *Out Loud*. I love the process and call it collage, where the structure is not narrative it's thematic and the themes emerged very clearly, the first section of the play deals with family, the second section deals with gender, and the last section becomes overtly political, so it shaped itself around themes.

In *WOKE* you are working with Alexandra Billings, how many projects have you done with her?

S/he and Me had two incarnations, and then we did *Stop the World*, we did *BS*, so this will be number 5.

How is your relationship and process evolved with your creative team and Alexandra Billings?

The best thing about working repeatedly with somebody is that the communication becomes quicker and sharper. In this play I'm working with my choreographer Brian Moe this is a 9th show we've done together, with Jared it's probably my 12th show, so I love to work with a team of people that know me inside out that I don't have to speak and they know, Alex is one of those people. She started as my student and through the five or six years that we've been friends and colleagues and students and teacher and all those things, I was actually with her Saturday night and we were driving on the freeway and laughing as we always do because Alex and I make each other laugh in a way that nobody else makes me laugh and I said, because I'm the most atheistic creature and she's much more spiritual than I, and I said, "Alex the only reason that I'm prepared to believe that there's something else beyond ourselves is because it's so unlikely that this seventy-year-old white South African Jewish woman and this 50 something year old brown transgender person are like one person." We are so similar in our approach and our attitude that even my two daughters when they met Alex said, "Mom that's what you really always wanted to be." There's just a complete glorious sharing of perspective, of humor, we even teach the same way which we discovered we've trained completely differently and come from completely different schools and backgrounds but in our approach of the students when I watch her work with them and she watches me work with them you actually can't tell the difference.

There is a lot of projections in the show, what role do they play in telling these various perspectives?

Until I know where Eby (Projection Designer) is going I can't answer the question, I know what's in my head but we've only talked theoretically. Interestingly enough because I worked over the summer and then into those first couple weeks in the workshop and we talk before we went away and she started to choose stuff. Then she started to design stuff reflecting what I said what the show is going to be about before I got any material. Then sent me what she was going to present in the first design meeting to the students, and I said, "Eby call me talk to me you haven't come to the WOKeshops and in fact no that's not what we're doing and that's not reflecting the work that we're doing!" So, she modified it radically but until they (designers) get into the room I don't know where they're going so we'll see. I have ideas, but

I've got to leave it up to my designers I've got to respect the fact that my designers are going to come up with something more interesting than what I'm going to come up with.

What do you imagine the bars to be representing in the show?

When Merve (Scenic Designer) first came up with the concept of the set she wanted the bars to be connected with sheets of Plexiglas because she saw it in terms of a kind of combination of Damien Hirst and Dilbert. Dilbert is a cartoon of the little man who works in the office, and Damien Hirst is an artist who puts things like whole sharks into formaldehyde and keeps them in Plexiglas boxes so you can see what is life, what is death, what is real, and what is not. She synthesized these two perspectives and she had everybody being confined and separated. The Plexi was too expensive so we couldn't do it, but we didn't need it because the poles themselves give us the separation so at the top of the show there are 12 squares that people are in, they're in isolated areas and separate. Then as the piece evolves they can be the bars of a prison cell, they can be the high rises walking through the streets New York or of downtown LA, they can be trees, they can be anything they want to be. They are a constantly shifting landscape of what confines us and what shapes us

Why do you think song and dance are necessary to tell these perspectives?

I think if we rely solely on word we get stuck in the rational and for me song and dance lift us beyond the rational into the emotional without any effort on the actor's part. We go directly into the audience's gut when we move in a way that is outside of their realism and when we lift the voice in a way that is outside of common conversation. What we're dealing with are things that are much bigger than the merely rational. That's why I'm in theatre. In Palm Springs where I also work they tend to give me the problem realist plays, with *Disgraced* and *Goat*, I'm dealing with big issues although they appear as realism they're not. I always like to find the form that expresses the greater truth which may not reflect reality. For music, Sondheim will always get to a truth about a reality or relationship far more profoundly than any word alone can do, it cuts to the gut; cuts the gut without going through the head.

Discussion Questions & Activities

1. If your house was on fire, and you could only save three things what would they be?
 - a. **Group activity:** Share the things that have been saved, improvise a skit using all the items.
2. In partners (or a trio), divide into Partners A and B
Partner A has 30 seconds to share:
 “One thing that does not get enough attention is...”
 or
 “One thing that no one is saying it...”
Partner B listens
Partner B cannot speak until time is up.
Partner B then repeats what they heard.

3. How do you define family?
 - a. Who are the members of your family?
 - b. **Group activity:** 1 person volunteer as “the sculptor”, this person shapes the rest of the group to create a family photo.
Using everyone in the group the sculptor gently puts each person’s body into the shape desired, this game is meant to played silently. After the sculptor is satisfied take a picture and discuss how this picture represents the sculptor’s family.

4. In *Woke!*... we hear many different ways that words that can hurt.

For example, someone when someone says, “That was a left-handed compliment.”, they mean that the comment sounded nice but was actually mean. It was a backwards compliment,, just as left-handed people were once considered backwards.

So what does the phrase “Left-handed compliment” imply about left-handed people?

Have you ever heard someone say something is insulting to people without thinking about it?

I hate when I hear...because...

I love when I hear...because...

5. **After seeing the show.**

The performers in *Woke!*... share very personal details about the things that matter most to them.

What is one thing that you are willing to share with a partner about what matters to you?

Dialogue prompts:

One thing that I really care about is...

One change I want to make in the world is...