

Acting For Indigenous Rights: Theatre to Change the World
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ISBN: 978-0-9675334-8-3

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University of Minnesota Human Rights Center
229 19th Avenue South, Suite N120
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455
Tel: 1-888-HREDUC8 / 612-626-0041
Email: humanrts@umn.edu
Website: <http://www.hrcenter.umn.edu>

Cover design: Nathan Embretson
Title page art: Body paint decoration by the Juruna Indigenous People of the Xingú Indigenous Park, Central Brazil.

ABOUT THE HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION SERIES

The *Human Rights Education Series* is published by the University of Minnesota Human Rights Center. Edited by Nancy Flowers, the Series provides resources for the ever-growing body of educators and activists working to build a culture of human rights in the United States and throughout the world. Publications in the series include:

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Acting for Indigenous Rights: Theatre to Change the World
by *Mariana Leal Ferreira*

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mariana Leal Ferreira (Ph.D. UC Berkeley-UC San Francisco, 1996) is a medical anthropologist from Brazil using Theater of the Oppressed and community-based partnerships to protect the human rights and improve the health of Indigenous Peoples in North and South America. Her books, articles, short stories, and plays discuss, human rights, poverty, violence, and the social causes of illnesses like diabetes. Recent publications include “Map-making in São Paulo, Southern Brazil. Colonial History, Social Diversity, and Indigenous Peoples’ Rights” (Sense Publishers, 2012); and “Theater of the Oppressed as a Rhizome. Acting for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Today” (*Latin American Perspectives*, 2012). She is currently an Associate Professor of Anthropology at San Francisco State University in California, where she co-directs the Global Peace, Human Rights And Social Justice Program and organizes the annual SFSU Human Rights Summit. She serves of the Board of Directors of the Pedagogy and Theater of the Oppressed international organization. In 2013, she received the Paulo Freire Human Rights Award presented by the American Educational Research Association (AERA).

Jiwon Chung is founding director of Kairos Theater Ensemble and adjunct professor at the Graduate Theological Union of the University of California, Berkeley. He is a former president of the Pedagogy and Theater of the Oppressed international organization. His approach to anti-oppression work is informed by his experiences as a veteran and three decades of vipassana meditation. He sees the stage as a sacred space where individuals can truly encounter each other and through this charged encounter “bend the arc of history towards justice.”

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PREFACE

By Melissa K. Nelson

Beware: in your hands is an effective manual for asserting human rights and facilitating social transformation. It is a radical manual for getting to the root of Indigenous rights and *all* human rights as humanity continues to face some of the most complex challenges of war, ecological and economic breakdown, and food and water insecurity – with Indigenous Peoples often being the “canaries in the coal mine” for early detection of these major challenges.

Yet as serious as these issues are, with a trickster like Joker guiding you through this book, you will also explore and uncover the extraordinary resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity. Through creativity and narrative and playing diverse roles, you, the intrepid reader, will travel an exciting path and learn about how “play” and drama can open up new ways of thinking and feeling. By learning the tools used by the Theater of the Oppressed, you can question long-held assumptions and embrace other ways of knowing and being. You can gain “insider” perspective into issues that may seem foreign to you. Through exercises and dramatized real-life stories of Indigenous struggles, the reader can gain profound insights and compassion about the plight of native communities and “other” peoples who suffer from human rights violations.

Acting for Indigenous Rights is an essential guidebook and practical manual for understanding the complexity of Indigenous rights in today’s world. Even as we approach the end of the second International Decade of the World’s Indigenous Peoples (2005 – 2015), most people today are completely unaware of the extreme struggles native peoples deal with on a daily basis – hunger, poverty, land loss, cultural discrimination, institutionalized racism, incarceration, and lack of legal rights. This book opens up a new world and a new venue for engaged dialogue and social action. It approaches seemingly intractable problems with engaged creativity, legal rigor, and creative inspiration.

I am excited to accept this book’s invitation to approach Indigenous rights from a different angle and use my imagination in new ways to change the world! Please join us in creating a more just, joyful, and peaceful world where Indigenous rights and the natural laws they promote are respected and honored.

A cultural ecologist, writer, media-maker and Indigenous scholar-activist, Melissa K. Nelson, Ph.D., teaches American Indian Studies at San Francisco State University and since 1993 has served as president of The Cultural Conservancy, an indigenous rights organization. Melissa is Anishinaabe/Métis/Norwegian and an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. Her work is dedicated to Indigenous revitalization, environmental restoration, intercultural understanding, and the renewal and celebration of community health and cultural arts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thousands of individuals, Indigenous leaders, families, communities, and organizations worldwide worked very hard for nearly thirty years to get the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples approved and finally adopted by the United Nations as a Declaration on September 13, 2007. What a victory!

Acting for Indigenous Rights celebrates this victory and invites actors and non-actors to become even more conscientious and playful by using Theater of the Oppressed (TO) as a pedagogical tool to commemorate and implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples across the planet.

Here we imagine a world in which everyone acts together to learn about these human rights and advocates for and defends them at the local, national, and international levels. It is a powerful and much-needed vision, so let's make it happen. Onward!

Many individuals, communities, non-for-profit organizations, and institutions have contributed to making this Indigenous rights manual and its related web-based materials a reality.

Indigenous communities in both North and South America, including the Yurok and the Xavante people, deserve special mention, for sharing aspects of their long-time struggle to have their human rights respected.

Indigenous organizations, in particular the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) and the Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN), merit extraordinary recognition, for their insights and editorial suggestions. In particular, I would like to thank Alberto Saldamando, former legal counsel for IITC, and Tom Goldtooth, IEN's Executive Director, for their request that we call attention to FPIC – Free, Prior and Informed Consent – as a key aspect of the UN Declaration and incorporate it into our TO learning activities.

Kristi Rudelius-Palmer, Director of the University of Minnesota Human Rights Center, believed in this project from the very start. Her vision that, yes, theatre can be key in the promotion of human rights, gave birth to *Acting for Indigenous Rights*. Many thanks to you, Kristi, for all your hard work supporting the human rights of all populations, in particular women, children, persons with disabilities, and Indigenous Peoples around the globe.

Nancy Flowers, the experienced editor of the University of Minnesota *Human Rights Education Series*, also gave life to this project. Nancy created all of the learning activities in this manual, adapted from Augusto Boal's book *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. With great patience, fantastic insight, and remarkable kindness, she led me through the meticulous process of articulating the stories told in the four plays, the joker's revealing interventions, and the dozens of

Learning Activities here included. Her extensive experience as a dedicated human rights advocate brought enormous energy to this project. I will be forever indebted to all your great work to make this manual happen, Nancy.

Former president of Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed practitioner and Director of Kairos Theater Ensemble, Jiwon Chung, provided essential guidance and training exercises on TO methodology. His main contribution to Chapter 3, “Give Wings to Your Imagination and Change the World: Write and Perform Your Own Play!” has helped bolster the idea that we are all actors in our everyday lives and that we all have the capacity to write our own plays. As Augusto Boal would say, “We are all theatre”!

Critical medical anthropologist and human rights advocate Nancy Scheper-Hughes, Chancellor’s Professor of Anthropology at the University of California at Berkeley, was tremendously generous to grant permission to adapt her work on poverty and violence in Brazil, *Death Without Weeping*, for Chapter 6, “Madness of Hunger.” I much appreciate all of the support Nancy afforded this theatre project throughout these years. *Muito obrigada!*

Students, friends, and colleagues who helped stage-read the plays, pilot-test TO learning activities at conferences and community centers, and provided comments included in this book warrant special recognition. A huge thank you to Celia Alves, Amir Arman, Dominique Devine, Hien Dinh, Nathan Embretson, Brad Erickson, Patrick Finnegan, Debby Kajiyama, Eva Langman, Saul Mercado, Vicky Nguyen, Dara Olandt, Lucia Volk, and many others who donated their time and enthusiasm to promoting Indigenous rights.

The Office for Biomedical Research at San Francisco State University, especially Professors James Wiley and Bruce Macher, offered invaluable financial support for the writing, training activities, and the final printing of this manual. This support was provided with an award from the National Institute for Minority Health and Health Disparities of the National Institutes of Health.¹

Last but not least, I would like to thank my close family members, Nathan, Mairum, Djuni, Pedro, and Amanda, who inspired me to carry on my work as a public educator by writing short stories and theatre plays. Not only did they put up with hundreds of hours of practice readings and rehearsals at home, helping to create props, sound effects, etc., but they also offered incredible insights for the characters’ development and the scenarios in each and every play in this book.

Mariana Leal Ferreira
Berkeley, CA, January 2013

¹ Grant number P20MD000544. The content of this publication and its related web-based materials is solely the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health.