**Headline:** Theatre of the Oppressed NYC

**Teaser:** For TONYC, theater isn’t just for entertainment; it’s a powerful tool for social change.

By: Caitlin Hoyland

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**[Article Body:]**

[Theatre of the Oppressed NYC](https://www.tonyc.nyc/) (TONYC) is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of theater to address deep-rooted social issues such as racial inequality, economic injustice, and other forms of oppression. TONYC’s work is a vital reminder of how theater can bring people together, foster healing, and build solidarity among marginalized communities.

TONYC, founded in 2011, engages audiences through an interactive and participatory approach, inviting them to move beyond being passive observers and become active participants in shaping the story. One of the main methods they use is “Forum Theatre,” where actors perform a scene of injustice or oppression, and the audience can step in to offer new ways of handling the situation.

“Theatre of the Oppressed is a global practice based on work developed by the Brazilian [theater] director Augusto Boal. Theatre of the Oppressed NYC… focuses on community practice of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) in ongoing Forum Theatre Troupes… At each performance, actors and audiences engage in theatrical brainstorming with the aim of catalyzing creative change on individual, community, and political levels,” states the organization’s [website](https://www.tonyc.nyc/our-work).

Liz Morgan, director of training and pedagogy for TONYC, while speaking at NYU Steinhardt in 2024, [said](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3y83wTEGPiY), “Forum Theater relies upon presentations of short scenes that represent a situation in which a person or community is being exploited or blocked from their human need.”

Forum Theatre troupes have been organized across New York and have partnered with several communities, “including unhoused adults and youth, people living with HIV/AIDS, immigrants, veterans, justice-impacted people, and court-involved youth,” [according](https://www.tonyc.nyc/our-work) to TONYC.

“Since its founding, TONYC has grown in response to a real need from communities in crisis for social change. Our team of Jokers—the people who facilitate workshops and performances—collaborate with TONYC’s troupes to create and facilitate public and private performances and workshops in New York City and beyond every year,” states the organization’s [website](https://www.tonyc.nyc/our-work).

The nonprofit encourages collaboration, understanding, and mutual support. This shared journey of healing and growth strengthens the bonds between people, making them better equipped to advocate for lasting change.

The organization offers several public trainings online and in person, such as “Legislative Theatre,” held online in May 2025, which helps individuals and communities use plays as a medium to bring about policy changes. “Whether you’re working to abolish oppressive laws or disrupt harmful practices, this workshop empowers you to engage in radical, participatory democracy. Together, we’ll imagine new futures, strategize bold actions, and keep the dialogue going,” the [website](https://www.tonyc.nyc/public_workshops) states.

For those “stuck” in an endless cycle of doomscrolling, the organization offered “The News is Not Neutral” workshop in May, “to interrupt that cycle and collaborate to reclaim the narrative!” It drew “from Augusto Boal’s Newspaper Theatre to explore how to take billionaire-controlled articles and headlines, and build provocative performance,” [according](https://www.tonyc.nyc/public_workshops) to TONYC website.

The impact of TONYC extends beyond the individuals who participate directly in their programs. It’s this collective empowerment that makes its work impactful, as communities united in purpose are better equipped to advocate for lasting change.

Rather than passively consuming information about injustice, audiences are invited to think critically about the issues, ask questions, and engage in meaningful dialogue. This helps people understand not just the problem but also their role in finding a solution. By inviting everyone to be part of the process, TONYC empowers people to take responsibility for the world they want to create and understand that they have the power to make a difference.

Ultimately, TONYC helps people see that art has the potential to be a deeply transformative force that harnesses the creative process to connect, heal, and build solidarity.