

Celebrating John O'Neal

Cynthia Cohen, director of the program in Peacebuilding and the Arts, said, "One of the great privileges of working as the director of the Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts has been the opportunity to meet and work with people of enormous talent, courage and wisdom. Among these folks, one that shines brightly in my memory is the theatre artist and Civil Rights leader John O'Neal. He was a founder of the Free Southern Theater, an arm of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, and later, Junebug theatre. He invented the storycircle, a process that invites equal participation and embodies democracy in action. He participated in the Brandeis/Theatre Without Borders collaboration Acting Together on the World Stage, authoring a chapter in the anthology, appearing in the documentary, and participating in many events on the Brandeis campus and elsewhere. He cherished these opportunities to be in conversation with international colleagues. John passed away on February 15th, 2019. We will always remember him for his uncompromising politics, coupled with the warmest of embraces. It is an honor to share a bit of John's unique blend of humor, passion, commitment and wisdom through his writing and his words. Please visit our Acting Together - Theatre & Conflict Transformation Youtube channel, and listen and watch as he discusses performance and peacebuilding. Please view his Acting Together case study, curator profile, and 2012 profile updates from the one-year anniversary of AT including John's acceptance of the Otto René Castillo Award for Political Theatre. The title of John's Acting Together chapter captures his spirit: "Do You Smell Something Stinky?: Notes from Conversations about Making Art While Working for Peace in Racist, Imperial America in the 21st Century." Also read the tribute by ArtSpot Productions.

"We lost one of our artistic fathers last month: John O'Neal, founding member of The Free Southern Theatre and founding artistic director of Junebug Productions, has gone on to dance with the ancestors. Without John's vision, work, example and mentorship, ArtSpot would be a different company. His way of combining art and activism; his processes (especially the story circle) for creating work; his founding membership in Alternate ROOTS; his relationships with funders, presenters and colleagues outside of New Orleans as well as here on the ground; his inclusion of young white artists like myself in the struggle for racial equity and Black liberation have all deeply informed our work. Even on an administrative

level, Junebug served as our fiscal sponsor for the first several years of our company's life..." Read more from ArtSpot Productions. Also read the Program in Peacebuilding and the Arts tribute in the March 2019 newsletter.

[New York Times Obituary](#)