

Jeff Friedman

Performin 'Signifyin': The Whitman Sisters Get In Your (Black) Face

BIO

Jeff Friedman is a choreographer and performer based in San Francisco from 1979 until 2003, when he received his PhD in Dance History and Theory from the University of California-Riverside. He is now Associate Professor of Dance Studies at Mason Gross School of the Arts, Rutgers University, where he teaches theory and practice of contemporary dance. Based on the ground-breaking scholarship of Nadine Graves, the Whitman sisters are a mixed-race set of mulatto sisters who developed minstrel shows during the late 19th century that countered increasingly rigid race classifications that emerged out of American industrialism. Performance is used as a tool to unravel what cultural critic David Roediger calls "the wages of white-ness." The lecture will discuss Cornel West's concepts of "signifyin'" as a uniquely African-American mode of over-the-top performance as a form of cultural critique.