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THE EVOLUTION OF HATE CRIMES & THEIR REPRESENTATION ON
STAGE

by

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B.A. University of Tampa, 2002

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the Department of Theatre
in the College of Arts and Humanities
at the University of Central Florida
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Major Professor: Earl D. Weaver

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ABSTRACT

My thesis focuses on how true-life events resulting from hate crimes have been theatricalized for the stage. My research discusses hate crimes that have occurred throughout history. My primary research centers on *Ragtime* (1897-1918), *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1939-1945) and *The Laramie Project* (2002), which deal with racism, anti-Semitism and homophobia, respectively. My intention is to highlight how theatre impacts the ideas and thoughts of audiences and transforms thinking and points of view forever, as well as impacting cultures and our world. In addition, I discuss the historical measures that led to these events and progression in modern times. Music, art and theater are known as “performing arts” which enrich our lives and leave us feeling complete. They also have the power to influence people and open minds and hearts to different ways of thinking about the world and its people.

"How lovely to think that no one need wait a moment, we can start now, start slowly changing the world! How lovely that everyone, great and small, can make their contribution toward introducing justice straightaway... And you can always, always give something, even if it is only kindness!"
— Anne Frank

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I dedicate my thesis to the people who have lost their lives due to hate crimes and for the men and women who serve our country that have sacrificed their lives in order to keep us from harm.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Why?

Why? Why do hate crimes exist? My examination of this question started in the summer of 1997. As an avid theatre patron, I was very intrigued to go see *The Diary of Anne Frank* on Broadway. This production starred Natalie Portman, Linda Lavin and George Hearn. I began to read The Diary of Anne Frank years ago but never finished the book and never fully understood the magnitude behind her diary, her life or the Holocaust. On this evening in New York City, there was an excitement in the air as crowds of theatergoers progressed to their preferred shows. As I entered the Music Box theatre and found my seat, I stared at a bare stage with little furniture, dark and mundane. As the show began, the lights dimmed, a family entered an attic with suitcases, took off their shoes and watched every step they took. You heard nothing but silence for at least five minutes as they communicated with hand gestures, opened their cots and organized their new home. Their home was located in the upstairs attic from Mr. Otto Frank's (Anne's father) office. Who would have known for two years and one month with little food, no access to the outside world, keeping quiet for half the day and watching every little step they took would be the only freedom they would ever enjoy? The question led me to ask, "Why?"

As I was engaged back to July 6, 1942 through August 4, 1944, I felt a part of my freedom had been taken away as I experienced the Holocaust in the same manner as the family. I understood their jubilation when they heard on the BBC that the war was coming to an end. However, that exuberant feeling was short lived. Simultaneously, a

German soldier entered through the annex door slowly and quietly with a gun pointed straight at the family. Anne, Margot and Peter Van Daan still rejoiced in the upstairs section of the attic as another soldier walked up the stairs pointing the gun at them, their limited freedom coming to a complete halt. Their world is changed, and now their helpless lives are about to be shattered, living in concentration camps and being separated from each other. One by one, as each individual leaves the attic for the last time, they never will be seen again. At the very end, Otto Frank is the only survivor and only has Anne's diary to live with for the rest of his life.

There was no curtain call at the end of this production, which made it even more powerful and real. As an audience member, I felt empty, lost, confused and distraught. Being an avid theatergoer, I had never witnessed a whole theatre of audience members still sitting in their seats consoling one another and just taking in the remaining ashes and pieces of what these families went through. At the end of my experience, I kept pondering the question, "Why?" Why would anyone ever think about hurting another individual just for their religious beliefs or be hateful towards Jews?

I vowed to myself to learn, ask questions, visit museums, read books on additional diaries and read the complete Diary of Anne Frank from beginning to end. In accomplishing these tasks, I have learned an immense amount of information. However, I realize there are still millions of stories of tragic losses that occurred during the Holocaust. But, most importantly, the Holocaust and Anti-Semitism are not the only hate crimes prevalent in our world.

Throughout my research, I found answers to the one question my mind has

pondered since the summer of 1997: from where did all the hatred start? That evening in the theatre changed my life in many ways, because it taught me something not from a book. Live theatrical performers who retold a story that never should be forgotten physically and emotionally affected me. Live theatre influences by transporting us to the time when these true historic events transpired. As Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor and author of his inspirational book, Night stated, “to those who lost their lives we remember, to those who survived we hear you, to the next generations, we must never forget” (Wiesel).

The notion of hate crimes affected me personally when the Twin Towers in New York City were attacked on Tuesday, September 11, 2001.

On Saturday, September 8, I received a phone call from my parents while I was attending college at the University of Tampa. They were at the World Trade Center and enjoying a beautiful day in the city. There was a parade for the Port Authority, for which my father works. The Port Authority owns the Twin Towers and my father and I had discussed that once I was back home for break, I would want to visit “Windows of the World”. No better way to enjoy New York City than to visit the Twin Towers during the holidays. On Tuesday, September 11, however, a friend of mine called and screamed, “We’re under attack! Is your father O.K.?” All I could say was, “What are you talking about?” She told me a plane hit one of the Towers. I rushed to the TV and saw a gash on Tower one with disbelief. After such a shock, I ran to the phone and called my dad. I had no idea what shift my father was working. The phone was busy. I kept calling numerous times and still could not get through. I called my mother and still no answer. I was in complete limbo. My father works in the Holland Tunnel but frequently goes to the

Towers since it is the Port Authority's main building. As I watched the event, I literally could not believe what was happening. News reporters were trying to confirm what really occurred. As more news kept breaking, I wanted to get through even more. All signals in New York City and New Jersey were busy. The news confirmed that it was a jet liner that had hit the Tower and much chaos was occurring in New York. All I could see on television were people in disbelief, crying, and talking amongst each other about what had transpired. New York was in a complete chaos.

At 9:03 am, I witnessed a second plane hitting the second Tower. I was speechless. I felt numb and so confused. As I watched the news, people were running from all directions as debris was coming down. By 9:30, my mother called and word was my father was safe but at work. All tunnels, bridges and trains in the New York City and New Jersey area were closed. By 10:05, the South Tower of the World Trade Center was crashing down. People were running for cover as much debris and clouds of smoke came their way. At 10:10, there was word another plane had hit the Pentagon Building in Washington D.C. At 10:28, the World Trade Center came crashing down. The Twin Towers were gone. New York, Washington, D.C and the United States were victims of a hate crime.

And why?

It simply was because we are Americans and believe in the beauty of freedom. I will never forget where I was, whom I was talking to and how the day ended. Everyone has their own stories and could tell us precisely what their ordinary morning was on September 11.

CHAPTER TWO: THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK

The Diary of Anne Frank was brought to the stage by Albert Hackett and Frances Goodrich in 1955. Their adaptation came from an immense amount of critical research on The Diary of a Young Girl as well as the experience of meeting with Anne's father, Otto Frank, and visiting the "Secret Annex." The play became an acclaimed Tony Award success for Best Play, along with other distinguished awards in 1956 such as the Pulitzer Prize and the Drama Critics Circle Award. But, most importantly; the play represents "Anne's spirit, optimism and nobility"(Arts Club Theatre, 20). Years later, the play was attacked with negative criticisms of including inaccurate facts and a lack of Jewish and Holocaust undertones in the authenticity of the play's story.

In 1952, a man named Meyer Levin, a prominent American Jewish author, was the original mastermind in wanting to bring Anne's diary to life in a theatrical form. Due to much conflict of interest in his direction in writing the play, it was later declined. His adaptation was "too Jewish" for the publisher's vision. Therefore, the project was later transferred to the writing team of Francis Goodrich and Albert Hackett to create a more "universal" approach.

By developing this type of angle, audiences did not see the pride of Anne, her family or their Jewish heritage. Therefore, the play, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, was a story portrayal that could have happened to any family during this time period. The show lost its true identity and was "factually and emotionally dishonest" (Rendell).

There was much speculation at one time that the diary was a complete hoax. Neo-Nazis had questioned Anne Frank's diary in order to deny the event of the Holocaust had even transpired. The Netherlands Institute for War Documentation tested her

handwriting, paper, ink and glue used in the diary. It was determined that it was authentic and indeed written by Anne during the Holocaust.

When the version of the diary considered by scholars as the “definitive edition” was published, it included all of Anne’s revisions and entries, even the ones Otto Frank had omitted. The diary was then designated into A, B and C versions. The A version, also known as the original, was written while Anne was in hiding in the “secret annex”. In the B version, there were many revisions of Anne’s original entries and some entries were completely omitted. In 1944, there was a message on the BBC from Gerritt Bikestein, who was a member of the Dutch government. He requested for the Dutch to maintain records from wartime to hold as evidence until the war was over. Due to this message, Anne began rewriting her diary by omitting certain entries she did not want to include. In addition to these changes, to keep the integrity of the people in her diary, Anne used pseudonyms. Such changes were the dentist Mr. Pfeiffer was called Mr. Albert Dussel; Hermann and Auguste van Pell were known as Mr. and Mrs. Van Dann; Miep Gies was Miep van Santen; Viktor Kugler was Mr. Kraler; Bep Boskjuil was named Elli Vossen; and Johannes Kleiman was named Mr. Koophuis. These pseudonyms were implemented into the theatrical version and are still used today. The C version is the form we are most familiar with today, entitled Anne Frank: “The Diary of a Young Girl”, with many of the entries added years later.

On December 4, 1997, *The Diary of Anne Frank* was revived at the Music Box Theatre with a new adaptation by Wendy Kesselman. More than 30% of the script was re-written and much more material was added. It all began when what scholars consider the “Definitive Edition” was released in 1995 that the new team of producers, David

Stone and Amy Nederlander-Casse, decided to shed a new light on Anne's legacy with new material. This creative team had collaborated with director James Lapine, which led to the discovery of Wendy Kesselman. He had chosen Kesselman to bring new depth and meaning to this new project. She was no stranger to this subject, as she was of Jewish heritage and had written a great deal about the Holocaust and World War II. With much research on the Definitive Edition, she was quite surprised "what a wonderful writer Anne was...I'm so moved by her writing –I really want her words to shine" (Park Square Theatre, 13).

Kesselman wanted to address the issues of Anne's developing sexuality and the de-Judaization undertone of the play dismissed through Goodrich's and Hackett's original production. As opposed to Goodrich's and Hackett's version that was audience appreciated, Kesselman's "adaptation fits the tragedy—with all its bleakness intact—into its historical context" (Arts Club Theatre, 20).

At the time the diary was written, Anne was between the ages of 13 and 15, which is an extremely important time in a young woman's life. This is a time when girls her age are developing interest in their bodies and the opposite sex.

"I think what's happening to me is so wonderful, and I don't just mean the changes taking place on the outside of my body, but those on the inside..."(Frank, 161).

In addition, adolescents are trying to develop a sense of self-image and trying to understand their own heritage. As these extremely important ideas are swept under the rug in the original version, it is easy to see why Kesselman, a Jewish woman herself, would want Anne's youth to be expressed in a real sense to audiences.

Kesselman wanted to accentuate the “real” Anne. She wanted to portray Anne’s personality traits of a troubled girl in a critical time in her development. Some of the characteristics that stood out were Anne’s obnoxiousness and disrespectfulness towards her mother and other adults. But we also see the other side of Anne—a young, chattering, spirited girl who just wants to live and see the brighter side of life. But even Anne would lose her way or direction and feel at times there was no hope. At one time or another there will be a breaking point.

“In the evenings when it’s dark, I often see long lines of good, innocent people, accompanied by crying children, walking on and on, ordered about by a handful of men who bully and beat them until they nearly drop. No one is spared. The sick, the elderly, children, babies and pregnant woman—all are marched to their death...and all because they’re Jews” (Frank, 72-73).

The attic may have seemed to be a hiding place or a place of freedom in a matter of speaking, but it was more like a cage that has lost its key... never to be found. Anne’s key in surviving was her diary, which became her comfort and confidant.

“I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone and I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support”(Frank, 1).

Her diary and pen were the floodgates to freedom as she expressed her innermost feelings about herself, surroundings and future. We witness Anne’s diary entries primarily through voiceovers to “Kitty”. One of the universal themes that dominate this play is fear, the fear of captivity leading to death. This play not only leads us to understand the lives of these families, but it also gives us a glimpse of what it was like

outside the attic walls. What we see and hear is a world full of hate and violence. The production I saw also utilized sound effects of bombings and loud sirens in the middle of the night and the chilling, stern voice of Adolf Hitler heard over the BBC. We also heard the full effect of off-stage violence, which deepened the level of fear for the characters as well as the audience members. Living inside the attic, it would only take one crucial misstep to disintegrate their chances of survival.

As spectators, we saw the everyday routines these families endured in order to survive. We got a chance to lurk and peak through the lens and place ourselves in hiding with them. The families had a strict regimen they had to abide: “They woke up at 6:45 a.m. and all used the bathroom. By 8:30, they had to be quiet, as work began in the warehouse beneath them. Breakfast was served at 9:00, and this was normally eaten in the Van Pell’s room, on the top floor, where they were least likely to be heard. After breakfast, all movement was kept to an absolute minimum until 12:30, when the warehouse closed for lunch. At this time, the inhabitants of the annex had lunch and listened to the BBC. At 2:00 p.m., the warehouse re-opened, and there was silence once again. Between 2:00 and 5:30 p.m. time was spent resting or reading. After 5:30 p.m., everyone could move around again, and the evening meal was prepared and served. At 9:00 p.m. everyone prepared for bed. During weekends, the routine varied, but with even more need to keep quiet to avoid attracting the slightest attention to what was supposed to be an empty building. This routine went on for two years”(Arts Club Theatre, 12).

On Friday, August 4, 1944 all hope came to an end. An anonymous phone call was made to the Gestapo and Dutch security police that Jews were possibly hiding in an office building. The families who once shared their lives in an attic were now separated

and sent to Auschwitz, a death camp in Poland. In September 1944, Herman Van Pell was executed in a gas chamber shortly after his arrival to Auschwitz. On December 20, 1944, Fritz Pfeffer died at Neuengamme concentration camp in Germany. On January 6, 1945, Edith Frank died in Auschwitz (Berkeinau) of exhaustion and malnutrition. In March of 1945, Margot Frank died of typhus at Bergen-Belson, and then a few days later Anne died of the same epidemic at the same camp. Two weeks after their death, the British liberated the concentration camp of Bergen-Belson (Domhelm). On May 5, 1945, Peter van Pell died in Austria at Manthousen concentration camp just days before it was liberated. In Spring, 1945, Mrs. Van Pell died in Theresienstadt camp in Czechoslovakia. The Russian Army released Mr. Otto Frank from Auschwitz on January 27, 1945. He was the only survivor.

The History: Beyond The Attic Walls

“Close your eyes and imagine being stripped of everything you have ever known. Everything you have worked so hard for vanishes before your eyes. You are made to wear a symbol on your arm that designates you as inferior. Your value as a human is equaled to the value of a sewer rat. People can call you names, inflict punishment on you, or even kill you without a cause. Your friends have been taken from their homes, babies and all, and have been exterminated. There are rumors about huge death camps, where people are being massed murdered by gassing. You know that it is only a matter of time before you and your family are taken to be killed. How do you save your family from death? Who do you turn to, when everyone is your enemy? This scenario is not fictional: it was a real time and a real place that existed. The Jewish people were made to suffer tremendous atrocities by Nazi Germany during World War II”. -Landfried

Following World War I, Germany suffered a huge defeat in their economic standing as well as a threatening depression. At this time, the persuading voice of Adolf Hitler led German people to listen and believe that a change would come and solve their

country's problems. He defined hunger and economic downfall as the fault of the Jewish people.

Due to his strong feelings against the Jews, he decided the best way to solve the problem would be to eliminate them all. Throughout the next ten years, he gained power and rank through his position in ruling Germany. By 1935, certain restrictions of Jewish people were beginning to take place. Jewish children were not allowed to attend German schools, go to libraries, movies, parks, shop in designated stores, participate in public sports, nor could they visit Christians. If Jewish people owned a business, they had to register it with the government and eventually had to transfer ownership to the Germans. Most importantly, all Jews were required to wear a yellow Star of David on their clothes to be identified.

By September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, which led to World War II and Hitler implemented his plan to kill all Jews. Concentration camps were one of the ways Hitler was going to erase all Jews from our world. In these camps, Jews went through a systematic selection process on who would live or die by the factor of who was fit for hard labor. Those who were chosen to work were separated from their families, stripped of their clothes, heads shaven, numbers tattooed and they were given striped cotton uniforms. However, if you were too weak, elderly or handicapped to work, you were sent to the gas chamber immediately. The gas chamber was an impersonal way to produce a mass killing of the Jewish people. They used a poisonous substance called Zyklon B (hydrogen cyanide), in which a pellet would be released into the chamber and transformed into gas instantaneously. This would eventually suffocate and eliminate the people within a 15- minute time period. There was an estimated 15,000 concentration

camps throughout various countries of Europe, Asia and Russia. One of the most well-known and severe camps was Auschwitz, located in Poland. This concentration camp was 6,720 acres of land, which is larger than 5,000 football fields. It contained three large sub-camps, which were Auschwitz I (Torture center); Auschwitz II (Birkenau), also known as the point of arrival or main “Death Camp”; and Auschwitz III, also known as Buna or Monowitz and was a work camp. In these camps, prisoners were used for medical experiments and were tricked into doing tasks that would cause them physical harm or even death. There are many children who did not survive the Holocaust, including one child who has touched the world through her words, Anne Frank.

When the war ended, the number of casualties and overall life that was executed was unimaginable: Poland 3,000,000; Germany 160,000; Czechoslovakia 277,000; Yugoslavia 67,000; Soviet Union 1,000,000; Austria 65,000; Hungary 305,000; Romania 365,000; Lithuania 135,000; Latvia 80,000; Netherlands 106,000; and Belgium 24,000(Kopf, 51).

Close to six million Jews were killed, died of diseases or were executed in other ways. Hitler’s other victims included homosexuals, gypsies, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Communists. In addition to this, “one and a half million children were murdered in the genocide the Nazi’s called “The Final Solution”. Anne Frank’s story is only one of them” (Domhelm).

Personal Reflection

In the play, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, we see families being forced to leave their homes and having their freedom stripped away, fearing them into hiding simply due to their religious beliefs. Their clothes are labeled with a Star of David, in representation of

shame. They are not seen as humans but merely as objects or numbers, more or less waiting to be killed.

What I have realized through my research of this story is that hate can develop for an unsubstantial reason. The tragic event of the Holocaust is the biggest demonstration of how Anti-Semitism and ignorance attempted to diminish a race of people. What makes this idea even harder to fathom is the fact that the only crime these people “committed” was being of the Jewish religion. When people learn about history, it is one way to make sure that history does not repeat itself. Through passing on these events and stories to children, it opens their eyes and minds to what has occurred in our past. Therefore, children can learn and hopefully make it easier to move us forward into the future.

According to author Victoria Barnett, “by getting to know the victims as people with faces, families, histories and personalities, the full scope of its tragedy becomes more vivid”(Landfried). Watching live performers on stage, there is always a sense of connection and understanding. We either hope for someone’s success or secretly wish for them to fail. In this case, we want this family to go back to their ordinary lives and live as human beings. Any message which defines treating others as we wish to be treated is always a message that should be taken to heart.

To us 546132 are just random numbers, but to someone else it might be a friend, a parent, a grandparent, or someone who died alone. The story behind The Diary of Anne Frank sets off emotions I did not even know existed inside me.

The performance I saw on Broadway has left an everlasting impression on me. The show accomplished the task of fulfilling its message and touching me in a unique

way. Anne Frank's story is a seed that began to grow and inspired me to learn about the Holocaust. It is a stepping-stone that reminds us that as human beings we need to accept each other for our differences. Little did Anne Frank know that her diary would affect future generations and that one day she would indeed become a famous writer:

"I want to go on living even after my death! And that's why I am grateful to God for having giving me this gift, which I can use to develop myself and to express all that's inside me! When I write I can shake off all my cares. My sorrow disappears, my spirits are revived! But, and that is the big question, will I ever be able to write anything great, will I ever become a journalist or a writer?"(Frank, 250).

The world outside "the secret annex" existed as a war of inhumanity, which included gassing and mass killings of the Jewish population. As these families experienced this time in hiding, they realized their own strength, courage and nobility they each possessed, which was quickly taken away through the actions of hate and ignorance. Even though they felt trapped and, at times, claustrophobic, they did not lose sight of why they were there. Their families and their lives were most important to them and, in hind sight, they had both of these and made the best of it. In this time period, Anne, Margot and Peter had no choice but to sacrifice their childhood and adolescence. Anne's diary provided her an outlet, an escape and a way of releasing anger, joy or feelings; she felt no one would understand and she could not confide in anyone. Young adults have the power to tell about the Holocaust, and it creates a silencing impact once others hear what actually happened. Through hearing these different stories and studying this time period in history, children can realize hate crimes still exist today, just in

different forms. We still face Anti-Semitic hatred today in different levels from bullying to the extreme of murder. Recently, an incident took place in a Holocaust Remembrance museum. An 88-year-old Neo-Nazi man, James von Brunn, who had been a firm believer the Holocaust and Anne Frank's diary were both a complete hoax, demonstrated an act of hate. On this morning, he entered the museum and began shooting, which led to one death. It is very interesting that the day of this event, there was a fictional play to be performed based on Anne Frank meeting Emmett Till, an African-American boy who was lynched for whistling at a white woman. James von Brunn also had an anti-Semitic website that demonstrated hateful language against Jews and other minority groups such as African-Americans. This man's view of humanity and the act he committed reminds us that when we are one step closer to equality, we take one step back. Our society is reminded that we still have work to do in order to achieve respect for all people regardless of religion, gender, color or ethnicity.

For a long time I have been pondering the question, "Why would anyone ever think about hurting another individual just for their religious beliefs or be hateful towards Jews?" In my questioning this thought, I have come to some very insightful conclusions.

In my experiences, I was always taught to follow the golden rule: treat others the way you want to be treated. I realize that as humans we make mistakes and learn from them. We gain knowledge from the consequences behind our actions leading us to make better choices in the future. Hatred starts at an early age. Many children are raised and taught to hate by influential people in their lives. You hear of instances when children are not allowed to associate themselves with others who are different from them in terms of race.

During World War II in Europe, many Christians were taught to hate Jews because Jews were believed to be the root of all-evil. Many Christians had no choice but simply follow this path and rid the Jews of their lives; out of fear their own lives were at stake.

When we are in a bind, we always try to find fault in someone else. Many people have a hard time looking in the mirror and taking full responsibilities for their actions. In order for us as a society to stop the hatred, we must first and foremost try to educate our children and people. As individuals we must try to find resources in order to reach out to people and gain an understanding that because we are different, it does not make us any more superior. We must try to follow the example that “in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart” (Frank, 332).

CHAPTER THREE: THE LARAMIE PROJECT

On October 5, 1998, a 21-year-old student from the University of Wyoming was kidnapped, robbed, beaten, tied to a fence and left to die in the freezing temperatures in Laramie, Wyoming. This boy's name was Matthew Shepard. Matthew was a human being who tried to enjoy life to the fullest, but his sexual orientation instigated others to keep him from continuing his life path.

One month after this tragic event took place, artistic director and founder of the New York's Tectonic Theatre group, Moises Kaufman, was curious by this current event. He wanted to know more about what transpired the night Matthew Shepard was murdered. Kaufman and his nine members of the Tectonic Theatre group traveled to Laramie, Wyoming and conducted close to 200 interviews from approximately 100 Laramie residents. The information collected would contribute to a play called *The Laramie Project*.

Kaufman's primary focus through these interviews is topics of homosexuality, religion, social class, economic status and education. This entire project took two years to gather information, reflections and responses. In addition, there also were many personal journal entries of the nine members conducting the interviews. These journal entries included reflections of their journey through the process as well as the challenges they faced.

Eventually these various monologues and diverse thoughts were edited, modified, organized and developed into the theatrical production of *The Laramie Project*. Through this experience, the audience saw how the performers actually represented the people of the town of Laramie who were interviewed.

The *Laramie Project* is structured as a docudrama, which is based on the true events surrounding Matthew Shepard's murder. However, it was written as if it were an actual documentary, with its main focal point as the demonstration of how the people of Laramie responded to this horrible crime. As the members of the Tectonic Theatre Group conducted the interviews, the information was formatted into three distinct ways. The first was in sections termed "moments", focused on the reactions of the members of the theatre group or the actual reactions of the citizens of Laramie. The second was through bits and pieces of interviews and reactions of what people said in response to the interviewers' comments at the time. The final pattern consisted of either announcements or speeches relevant to the story happening at that point in the play. Some examples of these are monologues stated in the courtroom during trials, statements from news reporters or reports of Matthew's condition from the doctors until the moment he died.

The Laramie Project's first performance was at the Ricketson Theatre under the auspices of the Denver Center for the Performing Arts in February, 2000. It later was performed in New York City at the Union Square Theatre. In November, 2002, the play was finally taken to Laramie, Wyoming. After these premieres, educational and professional theatre companies throughout the country have performed this show. My theatrical experience was nothing less than emotional with intangible thoughts when I saw the show at a Regional theatre in New Jersey. I understood Matthew was a human being trying to stay true to himself, a proud homosexual who went through many hardships of being accepted. He had many people who cared about him, accepted him and believed in him but others could never understand him. Again, a theatrical event incited me to ask, "Why?"

This particular production of *The Laramie Project* was simple but elaborate. It consisted of eight black chairs aligned with a projector backdrop and two video cameras on each end. In several scenes, the audience experienced live video footage in representing mass media, doctor reports on Matthew's condition until his death and the powerful, tear-eyed speech Matthew's father delivered during the trial. The actors portrayed multiple roles, including themselves as the interviewers, and the people of Laramie they grew to understand. We never lost sight of Matthew, even when the audience never visually saw his character on stage. How compelling a play, so moving and insightful that the spirit of a young man brought us to tears without visually seeing his soul. The art of theatre captured every moment, leading us to leave the theatre with many questions unanswered.

The theme of homophobia is the most important presented to audiences in Kaufman's play. A boy was left to die for eighteen hours in the freezing cold because he was different. The use of actual interview language challenges the audience to wonder how such an act occurred. This docudrama is clear-cut because it is not scripted but driven by real people and their feelings and opinions. It is real to the audience through the true insight of how people felt, regardless of whether or not the audience believes it to be good, bad or the plain truth. After this event took place in Laramie, homosexuals were afraid to come out for fear of what might happen to them if they did. One could see how it would be very frightening to reveal their true selves. The town's motto of "live and let live" seemed to change after the death of Matthew Shepard. Or did it? Many of the people interviewed knew Matthew Shepard on some level and, for the most part, he was

known as a good citizen and a wonderful human being. They also felt he may just have been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The Sparkling Lights

“I can just picture what he was seeing. The last thing he saw on this earth was the sparkling lights”-Doc O’Connor, The Laramie Project

“The mystery in this story was not who did it, but why?”(New Details Emerge). It was an ordinary Tuesday evening at The Fireside Bar in Laramie, Wyoming. Matthew Shepard had come into the bar and ordered a Heineken. He was just enjoying himself and the atmosphere around him. Two other men, Aaron McKinney and Russell Henderson, also were there in a different section of the bar playing pool. Within a 30-minutetime frame, Matt Galloway, the bartender of The Fireside, witnessed Aaron and Russell approaching Matthew at the other end of the bar. Aaron and Russell claimed Matthew made a pass at them, but, on the contrary, “they decided they would pretend to be gay to get him into their truck and rob him” (Kaufman, 31). After they left the bar, McKinney began beating Shepard with a gun across the face. When robbing Matthew, they took his credit card, cash that consisted of \$20 along with other belongings; however, they continued to beat him. Their justification for the beatings was to “teach him a lesson not to come on to straight people” (Kaufman, 31). As they drove the truck to a desolate part of town, they found a fence to tie him to. After he was tied to the fence, it was said that McKinney kept beating him senseless and those final strikes probably were what ended Matthew’s life.

On Wednesday evening, Aaron Kreifels found Matthew Shepard by accident when deciding to take a bike ride to Cactus Canyon that afternoon. When riding back

through unfamiliar territory, he ended up hitting a rut and went flying off his bike. It was then, when he got up to get his bearings that he noticed a figure, which from a distance looked like a scarecrow. As he approached the fence, he noticed hair and a chest rising and realized it was a human body. That body was Matthew Shepard. At this point, he ran to the nearest house to call police and report his discovery. "...It just makes me think that God wanted me to find him because there's no way that I was going to go that way" (Kaufman, 35).

As authorities arrived, Officer Reggie Fluty could see Matthew was still breathing but with difficulty. The central thought the officer expressed was that Matthew was covered in dried blood all over his head and body. She tried to give him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, but she was unable to open the passageways. The officer noticed Matthew's face was the only recognizable part of his body, and one could tell his head had suffered severe trauma. As she was acting on instinct in helping Matthew, she was not able to wear gloves that would fully protect her hands without ripping. The sheriff at the time had been known to be "cheap" and had not purchased quality gloves for the safety of the officers. Due to this, Officer Fluty made contact with Matthew's blood with open wounds on her hands. A day and a half later, the hospital contacted her to tell her that Matthew was infected with the HIV virus. She had to report to the hospital immediately for treatment. Due to the fact they discovered the HIV early and was able to treat her with AZT, she later became negative.

By the time Matthew Shepard was brought to the Poudre Valley Hospital in Fort Collins, "it was determined that he had suffered from a skull fracture that extended from the back of his head to the front of his right ear. He also had several deep lacerations on

his face, neck, and head” (The Laramie Project Summary and Study Guide). Matthew officially died at 12:53 a.m. on Monday, October 12, 1998 after lasting six days in a coma.

Gay Rights

Gay rights in the United States have progressed at a slow but steady process, and many strides have been made in different areas. The objectives are defined as “the demand of gays to be treated as equal citizens with the same rights, privileges and treatment as heterosexuals do” (Shepard).

In 1924, the Society for Human Rights in Chicago became known as the first acknowledged gay rights organization in our country. Since then, there have been progressive steps, varying in different degrees with one giant step almost every decade. In 1951, Harry Hay founded The Mattachine Society, which became known as the country’s premiere national gay rights organization. Due to his leadership skills in forming this club, many have thought of him to be the founder of the gay rights movement. In 1969, police raided a well-known gay bar in New York City called the Stonewall Inn. This bar was in Greenwich Village, and the protesting and raids that followed for three days afterwards are known as the Stonewall Rebellion. This incident became known as the breaking ground for the modern gay rights movement. By 1973, The American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. The “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Policy” in 1993 was adapted by the United States Military. This policy would allow homosexuals to serve in the military; however, it still banned the acts of homosexuality. This policy began in the early 1990’s, and it has led many people to leave their position or rank for fear of being discharged. Presently,

President Obama is trying to end this policy so Americans can take another step in the equal rights of all -- homosexual or heterosexual. President Obama had recently stated, "I can't end the ban with a stroke of a pen, but we're going to end this policy" (Yost). Mr. Obama is trying to make a giant leap to abolish this act not only from the standpoint of gay rights but more to show the world the social justice deserved by the people who have died for our country. In conclusion, our leader and Commander-in-Chief is setting up a precedent to strive for equality. This course of action has been active for 17 years and is ordered to end because it gives no rights or freedom to homosexuals who choose to enter the military. They are allowed to serve; however, if they "acknowledge being gay or are discovered engaging in homosexual activity, even in the privacy of their own homes off base, are subject to discharge" (Yost).

By the year 2000, Vermont became the first state to recognize and legally allow civil unions to be performed between gay and lesbian couples. There are now six states, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Iowa, Maine and New Hampshire, that have allowed homosexuals to get married. In addition, states of "Maine, Connecticut, New Jersey and the district of Columbia also offer legal alternatives known as civil unions and domestic partnerships" (Vestal).

The tragic event of what happened to Matthew Shepard on October 6, 1998 is an example of what hate crimes consists of, what results from them and how they can affect a town, a state or a nation. The Hate Crimes Prevention Act, also known as (HCPA) or the Matthew Shepard Act, was signed into law by President Obama on October 28, 2009. The legislation actually was presented in 1997 and took 12 years and numerous amounts of endorsements and votes finally to become a law. The official name is the Matthew

Shepard and James Bryd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act or Public Law No. 111-84(Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Prevention Act).In 1998, James Bryd, Jr. was an African American man who was severely beaten, tied and dragged from a pickup truck and then decapitated by three white supremacists. He was killed simply for the color of his skin. It is unsettling how it took over 12 years for this legislation to be passed and signed by a President. It also is a shame that it took an event like Matthew Shepard's and James Bryd, Jr.'s murders for a law such as this to be passed.

The murder of Matthew Shepard that evolved into the play *The Laramie Project* became an event that affected the town of Laramie, Wyoming, our nation and homosexuals everywhere. After this event occurred, attitudes of the town were questioned and challenged; gays were terrified to come out because of fear of what might happen if they did. In addition, this crime was questioned as to whether it was indeed a hate crime due to homophobia or an opportunity to steal drugs. Officer's Reggie Fluty and Dave O'Malley observed that there is substantial evidence that proves this event was indeed a crime produced from hate for homosexuals. Officer Rob Debree had stated: "We went in-depth reviewing (the murders') blood of any kind of drugs or anything to that effect. There was nothing" (Has Anything Changed?).Aaron McKinney also confessed that he began to attack Matthew after Shepard supposedly made a pass at him. All evidence leads us to understand that the attack was performed in a malicious manner towards homosexuals and all speculations should be put to rest.

Due to the magnitude of this event, the Tectonic Theatre Group wanted to return to Laramie in 2008 to see what had changed. Some of the questions were: "Has Matthew's murder had a lasting impact on that community? How has the town changed as

a result of this event? What does life in Laramie tell us about life in America 10 years later?"(Jones).This subsequent production was called *The Laramie Project: 10 Years Later*. Five of the original members of the theatre group returned, including the author, Moises Kaufman. The date this epilogue premiered in towns and cities around our nation was October 12, 2009, which included approximately 100 theatres. It also was performed in New York with original cast members from the *Laramie Project*.

Personal Reflection

As a society, we tend to judge a book by its cover. The way it looks, how it appears to be new with all its bright colors, or great binding. But there are times you come across a bland, subtle, colorless book, with no definition, and there it is – the best book ever read! Like everything else, there is far more to something than just the outer layer. They are all equally important and should have the chance to show their true value. There is no difference when it comes to people. We live in a world where diversity has far too many explanations and normalcy is far too complex. We have come to understand that being ourselves is probably the hardest obstacle we might have to overcome. Every day we either strive to be something we know we might never achieve, or we are the first to point and pass judgment on something we don't understand. Many people around the world pass judgment on homosexuals and make personal comments. We often wave the freedom of speech in a derogatory way and forget the impact we really have. Homosexuals, like everyone else, have a beating heart. They bleed when they are pricked, they cry when they are sad and they laugh when something is funny. That is what we call being a human being. We as a society may not agree with a certain lifestyle, but we do need to respect it. Part of being human is the freedom to be ourselves and

appreciate whatever that entails. We often make choices in our lives that others may not agree with or frown upon. Why is it we close our eyes to a person's inner beauty? Some people never will see things this way and only will view the world as black and white, cut and dry and will not open their minds to other ideas. This was proved when people were picketing at Matthews Shepard's funeral with signs protesting gays receiving rights. I understand there is a law and right for freedom of speech, but this act crossed a huge moral line and is despicable behavior. If we are trying to teach our children to learn from example, what kind of precedent are we setting if they see this kind of attack taking place?

Matthew Shepard was a hero to many mostly due to his courage of standing up for what he believed in. He was a leader, and through his tragic death, it opened the eyes of the world to the cruelty condemned upon a poor, innocent boy. Matthew had dreams and aspirations for equality so one day he could feel safe in releasing his whole self. Prejudice against homosexuals still occurs, even though some acceptance has transpired through time. However, discriminated youth in America can sometimes be the most surprising. Just two years ago, on February 12, 2008 a 14- year old boy, Lawrence King, was shot in a classroom full of students because he was gay. A few days earlier, the killer, Brandon McInerney was asked by Lawrence to be his valentine. Brandon could not handle this and felt the only way to deal with the situation was to kill Lawrence. (DeGeneres)

This is the main reason children have to be taught at a young age to accept all types of people. The sooner they learn tolerance for people of different skin, color, religion, background or sexual orientation, the better it is for them to function in a diverse

society. Lawrence's death makes us realize our world is filled with a lot of hate, and we need to change that. As a society, we also need to change the message that if you are gay and are open about it, you will be killed.

When something like this happens, it is the message children and adults see and hear. When people view others as equals and find rational, tactful ways to deal with certain uncomfortable situations, our world will be better. Not only does our society deal with people being killed due to the fact they are different or homosexuals, but, most importantly, more than ever before young people are committing suicide. Asher Brown, a 13-year old, shot himself in the head because of the stress of constant bullying he received at school due his size, religious beliefs, fashion style and being gay. His stepfather found Asher dead upon arriving home from work. There was no note or any indication that Asher was thinking of ending his life. However, the parents had stated numerous times that they had called the school and complained. What a shame it is to think this young child had to end his life because adults could not see to help him.

Tyler Clementi, an 18-year old freshman at Rutgers University, ended his life by jumping off the George Washington Bridge. He discovered that his roommate, Dharun Ravi, had not only videotaped him in the room with another man, but Ravi also broadcast it live over the Internet. Tyler did not want to face the ridicule and possible ramifications that it could have on his education or his future. So, Tyler took his own life. He had so much promise as a person and as a musician.

Justin Aaberg, 15-yearsold, hung himself after his relationship with his current boyfriend ended, along with enduring constant bullying from students at Anoka High School in Minnesota. At this specific high school, the administration has seen five

students commit suicide in the past year alone. “Three of them are believed to be tied to struggles with sexual identity” (Teenage Justin Aaberg). How sad it is that these students feel so betrayed, lost and confused and feel that they have no one or nowhere to turn? Many stories occurring with teen suicide due to bullying have indicated there were no warning signs or their guardians had no idea how much their children were suffering. With this epidemic spreading throughout our country, parents and teachers should have seminars or workshops with social workers. This way they can learn about how to identify non-verbal signs students are suffering silently and possible signs that children are thinking about suicide. It could be a valuable step in helping these children before we end up losing more than we already have.

The subject of bullying needs to be addressed, and social networks like Facebook, Twitter and You-Tube can reach kids in need. “Recently, new studies have shown that 9 out of 10 gay students have recorded being harassed. In addition, homosexual students are four times more likely than heterosexual students to commit suicide” (Davis).

As a society, we need to transform our ways of thinking in terms of homosexuals. There are countless stories and statistics that show that teasing, ridiculing and bullying are prevalent and need to be addressed. We must all try to lend an ear to many kids and teens needing help and make them aware it is alright to be gay and there is going to be a better tomorrow.

The Laramie Project is a play that speaks in many volumes, and its messages are ones that should be embraced and learned from. My experience before seeing this production never informed me about the struggles that many homosexuals go through on a daily basis. I have many homosexual friends, and I accept them for who they are. But,

by watching this play, I could never have imagined the consequences homosexuals go through for being themselves and how grave this subject matter is. Matthew's life is just one of thousands of young adolescents who endure the pain of feeling trapped behind closed doors. Many children of young ages are taking their own precious lives because they feel they have no place in our world. The deep scars and trauma they have suffered can never be healed. The damage is far too deep to be reconciled. The message of equality must be a priority. Our society is killing too many of our own through verbal and physical abuse. Educating kids throughout our country is our salvation for this epidemic to stand still. We must strive for a better tomorrow and take a stand on equality for homosexuals. The epidemic of gay teen suicides has reached a level of panic and awareness. Our school systems must find a breaking ground and a solution to this problem. From statistics, we can see we are not doing enough. These suicides have been going on for many years, but with an overflow of deaths recently, we now try to see there is a problem that has been there all along. The art of theatre once again was a learning tool for me to expand my thoughts and views on a subject matter I never quite understood. Matthew's life has changed the world and perhaps changed the views of many after his death, but not enough. We as a society must take a stand by leading, educating and giving value to homosexuals. "You can't have acceptance without tolerance" (Grade).

CHAPTER FOUR: RAGTIME

*“It was the music of something beginning,
An era exploding a century spinning in riches and rags and in rhythm and rhyme
The people called it Ragtime...”*-Lynn Ahrens, *Ragtime the Musical*

Ragtime, the musical, is based on E.L. Doctorow’s novel written about the challenges and prejudices in America at the turn of the 20th century. It is a story centered around the lives “of three extraordinary families as they confront history’s timeless contradictions of wealth and poverty, freedom and prejudice, hope and despair, and what it means to live in America”.(*Ragtime the Musical*)

This musical opened on Broadway January 18, 1998 at The Ford Center for the Performing Arts Theatre, starring Brian Stokes Mitchell (Coalhouse Walker, Jr.), Audra McDonald (Sarah), Marin Mazzie (Mother) and Peter Friedman (Tateh). *Ragtime* was graced with 4 Tony Awards, but not for Best Musical. It received the Drama Desk Award and Outer Critics Circle Award for Best Musical and Best Score. In 1994, the story of *Ragtime* began its transformation from a novel into a musical by a Canadian theatrical producer, Garth Drabinsky, and book writer Terrence McNally. Drabinsky was very particular on what his vision was for the musical. Therefore, he auditioned many composers and lyricists by requiring them to submit a demo tape of their work. Once he heard a variety of different styles of musical selections, it was clear lyricist Lynn Ahrens and composer Stephen Flaherty were the team with which to collaborate. The final piece of the production team puzzle came when Frank Galati was chosen as director and Graciela Daniele as Choreographer. *Ragtime*’s first performance was December, 1996 in Toronto, Canada. After it received excellent reviews, it was brought to Las Vegas in Summer, 1997. During this run, the production team added its final touches on their

newest masterpiece in preparation for the Great White Way. The show debuted on Broadway January 18, 1999, which was the first show to be performed in the Ford Center for the Performing Arts.

My first theatrical experience with *Ragtime* was met with much anticipation when I saw it on Broadway. The set design and costumes were most instrumental in giving the audience a clear understanding of the musical's characters and time period. One of the most riveting numbers of the show was its opening, "Ragtime". We were introduced to three social classes divided by their own identities: the aristocrats, the immigrants and African Americans. The weaving movements in a triangular motion represented the segregation between the three classes of people. The choreography facilitated essential characters meeting one another and experiencing individual class struggles, prejudices, changes and even death. Along with the leading characters, we witnessed historical figures Henry Ford (founder of the Ford Motor Company), Booker T. Washington (founder of the first United States College for blacks and a prominent educator at the turn of the century), Evelyn Nesbit (a celebrity who starred in silent films and was known as an artist's model), Harry Houdini (an escape artist and magician), Emma Goldman (active in the trade union movement as well as an anarchist) and J.P Morgan (an American financier who helped to develop electric companies and began a steel corporation). Each historical character has a symbolic or metaphoric connection to the leading characters "whose themes encompass immigration, racism, social injustice, celebrity, politics, industry and capitalism" (Rooney).

The Broadway production of *Ragtime* I saw was ostentatious, but its spectacle did not overshadow the story of the dominant character of Coalhouse Walker Jr. Coalhouse

Walker, Jr. is a man full of dreams and ambitions who works hard as a respected citizen and uses ragtime music to demonstrate his hopes for a better life. But, all is shattered, literally and figuratively, when prejudicial white men vandalize his model T-Ford car, and Sarah, the woman he loves, is beaten to death. Sarah was impregnated out of wedlock by Coalhouse Walker Jr., who later tries to win her heart back for several months. She felt abandoned and lost. Once they rekindle their love, they envision a brighter future for them and their child. It later turns sour, as Sarah tries to help Coalhouse regain his car and establish his equality with those who belittled him. After numerous failed attempts for help, Sarah approaches James S. Sherman, a Vice-Presidential candidate, in order to find justice. Sarah's good deed turns in an instant as she is wrongly accused of possessing a gun and struck with many blows leading to her death.

In conclusion to this tale, Sarah's death led Coalhouse to take matters into his own hands. Coalhouse and his men become wanted fugitives who go to all extremes from "killing firemen and burning firehouses" (Ahrens). He and his men will stop the violence when his model T-Ford car is restored to its original form and Willie Conklin, the man who forbid him to pass and destroyed his car, is handed over to him. But, with much persuasion from Booker T. Washington and for the sake of his new-born son, Coalhouse tries to find some solace. As he surrenders and opens the door from the J. P. Morgan Library, which he attempted to blow up, a rampage of gunfire ends Coalhouse's life. Justice never prevailed.

"Till We Reach That Day "

In establishing rights for African American, there have been many hardships and struggles, which have led to where we are today. Many brave African Americans stood

up for their integrity, pride and justice for all. They have been the founding leaders in making equality an essential priority in our country forever. At the turn of the century, there was a major influence in the advancement of African-Americans being educated. He was Booker T. Washington.

At a young age, Washington displayed academic potential and was encouraged to continue his scholastic endeavors. The principal of Washington's future institute, Samuel Armstrong, became his mentor and believed "it was important that the freed slaves received a practical education" (Simkin, Booker T. Washington). Due to the educational foundation that Washington had developed, he was able to begin working at a local school in his hometown in 1875. By 1878, his mentor was able to find him a job teaching Native Americans at the Wayland Seminary. Two years later, three influential men of the time, Lewis Adams (an African-American political leader) with William Foster and Arthur Brooks (two Caucasian democratic party candidates), began working together on a new Negro school, to be named the Tuskegee Negro Normal Institute. The school officially opened on July 4, 1888 and taught academic subjects, while the underlying focus was a practical education for students. Instead of hiring a white teacher to lead the school, it was suggested by Armstrong that Washington be hired. Because of his political and educational background and influence, Washington was able to interview and hire first rate staff to his faculty. While Washington was working on these goals, he also was gaining the respect and trust of white citizens. Washington believed and professed that African-Americans could gain a political voice by enduring difficult tasks and hardships. In this way, he became a mediator of businesses between races and educating African-Americans to gain social acceptance by white people. In the end, this would help further

their future in a predominantly white society. This inspiration worked well with the whites of the south who felt that his thinking and teachings were exemplary. Eventually, this led to prominent white businessmen of the time to contribute large amounts of money to the Tuskegee Negro Normal Institute for its advancement.

In 1905, at the turn of the twentieth century, W.E.B. DuBois founded the Niagara Movement, which became the foundation for the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People). This movement was more proactive and required instantaneous results for equality in all areas of American life. Four years later, the NAACP was officially formed and led by W.E.B. DuBois. This organization became known as an important stepping-stone in African-American civil rights. The focus was on political equality and social justice.

By 1948, African Americans had earned the right to be fully integrated into the armed forces and more diversely fight in American wars. African-Americans had participated in previous wars; however, they were not fully recognized for their efforts until Harry S. Truman issued this executive order.

Dating back to the end of the American Civil War, many Southern states developed laws that were anti-African American, which became known as the Jim Crow Laws. This group of laws enhanced the discrimination of blacks during this time period in relation to where they were allowed in public and what transportation services they could use. African-Americans were told which schools, restaurants, hotels and movie theatres they could attend. In addition, they were told which trains and buses they could use, and interracial marriage was prohibited. It took almost 100 years for efforts to be made in ending the segregation of public transportation.

By the year 1950, the NAACP made their primary focus not to separate people on buses and trains by color any longer. In 1952, it was officially unconstitutional for African-Americans and whites to be forced to sit in separate areas of buses or trains. However, southern states kept their own laws on segregation through the public transportation system. It brings up an intriguing question that if laws go through the Supreme Court, why is it that some states can still institute their own laws and regulations? This type of system seems unconstitutional.

On December 1, 1955, an African-American woman by the name of Rosa Parks took a stand for all people of her race and equality among Americans. While on her way home from work, she refused to give up her seat for a white man when the entire bus became filled. “When I made that decision... I knew that I had the strength of my ancestors with me” (The Story Behind). By neglecting to surrender her seat to a white man, Rosa Parks went against the “Jim Crow Laws” and was therefore arrested. Parks was the third woman to be arrested for this “crime”. The reason her action became so famous is because she was a prominent former secretary of the NAACP as well as a leader in her community.

Another leader for the African-American community was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In his life, he was a man of many roles, which included successful student, husband, father, and Pastor. But, most importantly, he was known as an active citizen for civil rights. At the same time, he was a prominent member of the NAACP. One of his contributions to the African American community was the assisting in the boycott of the bus system of Montgomery. He decided he wanted to speak up for his race in support of Rosa parks and felt strong action was needed for their voices to be heard. On December

5, 1955, African-Americans in the area of Montgomery, Alabama did not ride the buses. King was arrested, and his private home was bombed. On December 21, 1956, the ruling for the segregation of public buses came from the U.S. Supreme Court, and the boycott ended. However, his biggest and most influential contribution for African Americans was on August 23, 1963, when he delivered his “I Have a Dream” speech. This speech was read from the steps of the Lincoln memorial in Washington D.C., during an important event called the March on Washington, which focused on job and freedom. King also was known as the youngest man to receive the Nobel Peace Prize at the age of 35 and donated his earnings to further civil rights advancements. On August 4, 1968, James Earl Ray assassinated Martin Luther King Jr. while King was helping a strike for garbage workers in Memphis, Tennessee.

Another major stepping stone in the advancement of colored people was the Congress of Racial Equality or (CORE) developed in 1961. They developed a program called Freedom Rides, where Caucasians and African-Americans journeyed through different states together and placed themselves in desegregated situations. It was a big step in the right direction to promote equal rights to all throughout the United States. By 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson passed a Civil Rights Act through Congress. This act declared “racial discrimination in public places, such as theatres, restaurants and hotels, illegal” (Simkin, Jim Crow). In addition, this is when employers had to begin providing jobs as equal opportunities to all. The final action of the Civil Rights Act was that there would be no federal money given to projects, which revolved around skin color, race or national heritage.

Personal Reflection

Ragtime's story is a significant part of our history and how such issues are still prevalent in our society today. The social injustice against African -American people still lives on even after many strides of improvement. Race has always been one of the many controversies that will probably always exist. Sadly, it is not much different than what you see in *The Laramie Project* for someone who is gay or in *The Diary of Anne Frank* for being Jewish. In these stories, you simply are judged for who you are.

In the musical, *Ragtime*, many obstacles occur; obstacles that are not much different than today. Racism is seen as much more than name-calling—it's a horrendous act of hate that truly affects one's thinking and behavior.

Even though the leading character is fictional, his story, in many ways, is still true. Power consumes, people of color are denied and the poor are left striving for a better tomorrow. We see incidents where injustice happens in everyday life, and it makes us think that maybe nothing has changed in the past one hundred years. Actor Alton Fitzgerald White, portrayed the role of Coalhouse Walker Jr. on Broadway, On the afternoon of June 16, 1999, as White was leaving his home to go to the bank, he opened the door to his building to find police authorities stopping him, handcuffing him and searching him, along with three other African American men. White asked for the reason behind his arrest but was told to keep quiet. There had been a drug deal inside his apartment building earlier in the day and due to his skin color he was brought in for questioning. At the police station, White was strip-searched and placed in a holding cell with the suspects the police later had found as part of "their procedure". As this series of events took place, White felt that all justice, morals and manners he learned from his

parents had fallen by the wayside. When he was finally released, the reason he received for being handcuffed and brought to the station was that he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. However, this was where he lived. When we are taught as children the police are there to protect us and serve the community, we cannot envision how an innocent mistake can change that vision. But for Alston Fitzgerald White, it certainly did, and he feels that “life will never be the same” (White).

I Have a Dream

“I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.” I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today!”(Martin Luther King Jr.) (Mount)

This speech by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. brought people together to hear thoughts and ideas expressed about freedom, equality, meaning of brotherhood and, most of all hope. In the society in which we live, the characteristics of cooperation, respect for authority and acceptance of different people are qualities we should try to acquire within ourselves as adults. If we can open our minds and hearts to all people – black or white, Christian or Jew, homosexual or heterosexual – we might find more peace instead of war, more friends instead of enemies and more happiness instead of hate. We must all have a dream to find peace within ourselves and the surroundings of other human beings who are different. We all should take a stand in making the right choices and lending our hearts and minds to those who do not know what they do.

In watching *Ragtime*, I realized people like Coalhouse Walker Jr. helped develop change for the African American community and possessed a building block that helped create the foundation of what America is today.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

I have gained a tremendous worth of knowledge in the process of writing this thesis. I have gained a better insight of the historical events as well as the struggles we endure in modern times. Hatred and discrimination cannot be defeated overnight, but we must not lose sight that if we can at least reach one human being one day at a time, we can find much promise in the near future. After concluding my research and gathering my thoughts, I reflected as to what made me write about such a topic. Why was I so passionate about learning about cruel atrocities that happened to human beings?

America experienced hate on September 11 just as Anne Frank, Matthew Shepard and Coalhouse Walker, Jr. experienced hate. As Americans, we stood tall, supported one another and became united as one. The tragedy brought everyone together in the most surreal way. People, who did not know each other hugged, consoled and even prayed together. Thus, another question: does it have to take a tragic event to bring us together and open our eyes to resolve the problem? This is a prime example of the similarities of Anne Frank, Matthew Shepard and Coalhouse Walker, Jr. Each possessed a vision of future endeavors, promise, freedom, love, acceptance, equality and most of all, life. Their deaths should open the eyes of the whole human race. We cannot change for a day or a month or a year; we must change for many years to come. We must teach by example, and we must try to learn from the whole human race.

The idea of people being considered the “norm” or the “other” is an idea slowly taking over our society in terms of our youth. We now live in world in fear of terrorism, which has led us to discriminate against all who are in the Muslim faith. Muslims are now stereotyped to be terrorists and are a target at all costs after September 11. Teens and

young adults are being teased, ridiculed, and sometimes beaten due to their sexual orientation. “Other” can refer to someone of the Jewish faith as opposed to being a Christian. It also can refer to an immigrant not born in America. Labeling people makes them feel inferior and as if they are second- class citizens. It is no wonder that people may change or hide because they belong to a group or organization not considered to be “normal”. Thus, I still ask, “Why?”

Why is the world the way it is today?

Why was Anne Frank never given a chance to live?

Why was Matthew Shepard beaten to death?

Why was Coalhouse Walker, Jr. not given the same equal rights as he rightly deserved and in result killed?

Why did 6,000,000 Jews amongst others die during the Holocaust?

Why did 2,998 victims die on September 11?

I see the answer to these questions as a thirst for power. Some people will go to all lengths and at all costs to control what is not theirs. Majority rules and minorities pay the price. Violence is the only solution to many people’s problems. The powerless are the ones who want to be in power. They are the ones who fear of what they do not know.

In my experience in writing this thesis, I hope to go beyond the keys and computer screen. I hope to one day bring these shows to life with my own wisdom and vision by directing them in professional theatres or educational institutions. I want to share the importance of what these stories mean to me: the future for our children, families and our world. I want to embody the passion I have in retelling about these lives

and how precious they will always be. My goal is to educate and give it my very best in using my craft as an artist to give respect to those we try to learn from everyday.

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