

Backstage: The Diary of Anne Frank

January 2017

The decision to produce *The Diary of Anne Frank* was made well over a year ago. Even so, I can't help but think as we approach tech week, that no other play could feel so timely. This week the FBI is investigating bomb threats at more than two dozen Jewish community centers. This on the heels of threats to 16 community centers the week before.

As a nation we are walking into a new presidency endorsed by white nationalists and the KKK. Throughout the campaign we saw analogies and memes comparing the Republican candidate to Adolph Hitler, particularly in response to his call to ban Muslims from the United States.

Frank Navarro, a California high school teacher and Holocaust scholar, was placed on paid leave last November after drawing comparisons between Hitler and President-elect Donald Trump in his classroom. The classroom. A place that, in a democracy, should be safe to examine and explore history and its implications on our current events. After all if we do not examine our history are we not destined to repeat it?

But the history of "othering" a group of people based on religious beliefs or nationality has long been with the human race. Ethnic cleansing goes back as far as 350 AD when China's General Ran Min ordered the extermination of the Wu Hu, especially the Jie people, during the Wei-Jie war. In our more recent memory we have witnessed the persecution of Croats and non-Serbs in Bosnia, the massacre of nearly one million Tutsis by Hutus in Rwanda, the horrors of Darfur and so on.

In the 20th century, perhaps the most widely recognized genocide is the Holocaust, perpetrated by Adolph Hitler, killing around 11 million people, 6 million of whom were Jewish. The play, *The Diary of Anne Frank* is based on the writings from the diary kept by Anne Frank while she was in hiding for two years with her family during the World War II Nazi occupation of the Netherlands.

How fortunate we are that Anne Frank's story survived the war. It allows us a glimpse into the humanity of those that found themselves in an unthinkable situation. I am sure their faces are mirrored today in the faces of Syrian refugees.

The play is at its simplest a window into a family's normal struggles of co-habitation, parenting, desires, fears and growing pains. But at its grandest it is a reminder that even in our darkest hour "we are part of a great pattern. That we are just a little minute in life."

In our current tumultuous political climate, I've had difficulty finding my feet. It has been overwhelming. The ugliness and hate seem to outweigh the beautiful and loving. So perhaps the timeliness of this play for me is more personal. Perhaps I need the reminder from a fifteen year old girl some 70 years ago that "in spite of everything, I still believe people are good at heart."