

Media reaction paper – west side story

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Media Reaction Paper: West Side Story West Side Story was one of the first musicals this writer saw on Broadway. It was such a mesmerizing experience to live the culmination of the hard work performed by a group of very talented individuals that stemmed from a single idea. It was not until research was done for this paper that this student realized what a great cultural impact West Side Story was when it was first introduced to audiences. The book for West Side Story was written by Arthur Laurents in 1949. An interesting fact about this legendary story is that it was not always named West Side Story.

The original name given this tale, based on Romeo and Juliet, was “ East Side Story. ” It was written as a rivalry tale between a gang of Roman Catholic teenagers named The Jets, and a gang of Jewish teenagers named The Emeralds. Because this topic of rivalry between the Jewish and Roman Catholic communities was redundant in the industry at the time, the creative team composed of Arthur Laurents, Jerome Robbins and Leonard Bernstein, decided to put the project on hold. Thus, they ceased work on the idea for a period of almost five years (Miller, 2006).

After five years the creative team reunited to work on other projects and decided to revisit East Side Story and give it a completely new twist and decided to set it in Harlem, New York City (Miller, 2006). West Side Story depicts the love between a Caucasian teenage boy from the West Side of New York City and a young Puerto Rican girl from the same neighborhood. The characters were all from a poor neighborhood and hung out on the streets together. There were two gangs that were in constant conflict with each other: The Jets and The Sharks.

Tony, the main character, is a member of the Jets, a gang composed of Caucasian teenage boys. He is however, different from the rest of the members and wants to work and someday go on his own way. Maria is the sister of the leader of the Sharks, a gang composed of teenage Puerto Rican boys. Maria and Tony meet and instantly fall in love and have to deal with the turmoil of being from different cultural backgrounds and the difficulty of having their love accepted by each of their groups. The relationship causes conflict in the neighborhood that results in violence and ultimately Tony's death.

West Side Story was considered a breakthrough for the Puerto Rican community. Very little exposure about the Puerto Rican culture and their presence in New York City had been portrayed in any type of media up to the time the play's debut on Broadway. Although Puerto Ricans were depicted with stereotypes that were not necessarily true about their culture, the story delivers a message of change. It describes racism as dangerous and as an obstacle to love. To have developed such a controversial story during times when segregation still existed in the United States was very brave.

What softened the diversified and strong topic was the fact that it was a musical with very vivid choreography and colors and an upbeat script full of humor. This factor made the story more acceptable to the American people. The media has its ways to persuade the masses. Within the past century, the media has played an important part in the cultural changes in America. Television, radio, theater and written works have broken through the racism barriers to expose the many faces of the American population.

Everyone is different and their cultural background makes a special contribution to the community of the world. West Side Story is a good example of a media piece that addressed America's cultural diversity in a time when most people had no idea how multicultural our country really was.

References Miller, G. (Winter-Summer 2003). Arthur Laurents chronology. American Drama, p. 1(9). Retrieved November 10, 2009, from General OneFile via Gale: <http://find.galegroup.com/ezproxy.apollolibrary.com/ips/start.do?prodId=IPS>