TheatreTalk: (In)Justice

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Theatre Talk: (In)Justice

Creating Critical Thinking and Conversation Through Methods of Performance using Fiddler on the Roof as an example

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Theatre, Performance, and Activism

Art is inherently political and no art, in my opinion, is better suited to activism than performance. I personally believe that theatre is one of the greatest vehicles for developing critical social change and cultivating conversation around issues of injustice. For me, there is something uniquely captivating about the power of people sharing a space and watching a live performance. It has the potential to be an extremely productive way to communicate a message, while also creating a secure space for audience members to critically engage with the subject or material and step into other people’s stories. Fostering a safe environment for children to participate in this process not only allows them to develop compassion and awareness from an early age, but gives them the opportunity to increase artistic, imaginative, social, and problem-solving skills.

It is important to acknowledge both the perceived and actual exclusion and barriers that can exist around, particularly traditional, theatre institutions. This can manifest monetarily, by location, through appropriation, biases, and selected materials. However, there are a variety of methods to avoid and even counter such elitism or exclusionary tactics. I will highlight a few in the following, with the caveat that there are a myriad of techniques that combine theatre and activism in effect and effort to break down socio-political barriers and provide commentary. In addition, many of them can overlap or blend together.

Types of Activist Theatre:

**Devised Theatre**— Is a method that has become very popular recently. Devising, which can be utilized across disciplines like art, dance, writing, etc., involves collective creation, with a group of participants coming together and developing a work or pieces of work. In theatre, this means coming together without a script and, through whatever chosen methods, building that text as a group. Devised Theatre is generally used to address or tackle some form of social issue(s) (although not always) and start a discussion with the audience. The process of devising and the impetus for choosing a subject is various and generally involves different activities of movement, writing, and improvisation. As inspiration, you can start with a theme or big idea and build around it, or use a piece of
literature/music/images/etc. go generate ideas. This allows for both a great feeling of ownership and collaboration, as well as the opportunity for participants to gain a level of expertise and insight in the subject to lead critical discourse with fellow creators and the audience. It is important to note the emphasis on process surrounding devised theatre—the methods and experience of devising a piece are often considered just as (if not more) important than the final product.

**Docu-Theatre (Documentary Theatre)**— Also known as Researched-Based Theatre, this type of theatre is essentially self-explanatory and can meld with methods of devising theatre. Docu-Theatre incorporates some form of research, first-hand experience, and/or primary source documents into the final product. This could be statistics, quotes, excerpts of interviews, images, pieces of music, etc. Docu-theatre is generally utilized to provide critical commentary.

**Theatre of the Oppressed**— Cannot talk about theatre and activism without addressing Theatre of the Oppressed, developed by Brazilian theatre practitioner and political activist Augusto Boal. Community based performance, Theatre of the Oppressed is used as a tool for education and social change. Theatre of the Oppressed is essentially a title that refers to a variety of theatrical forms and methodologies that combine activism and revolution with theatre and community education. I will highlight a few of these forms.

**Forum Theatre**— Actors perform a play in which a form of oppression is played out. At the conclusion of the piece, the oppressed characters fail to overturn or confront the exhibited oppression. The play then starts over (sometimes a condensed version) with the audience having the option to pause the performance and take the place of the actors. By doing so, the audience actor (also known as a spect-actor) has the opportunity to change the course of the story and successfully overthrow the oppressors. There can also be additional repetitions of the play where audience members can take over the role of the oppressors. All of this is done not inherently as an act of revolution, but to offer people and communities a chance to practice or explore ways of achieving revolution.

**Legislative Theatre**— is similar to forum theatre, however, the subject and context of the performance is to be related to proposed laws and legislation that could potentially be passed or rejected in the country, region, or city of where the piece is performed.

**Invisible Theatre**— takes place in a found space (a space not traditionally used for theatre, for example a street corner, park, grocery store, etc.). The actors enact a performance, while disguising the
fact that it is a performance (and that they are actors) from observers. The “audience—” passersby and observers— can intervene, participant, comment, engage, or not in what they view as a real event.

**Newspaper Theatre**— is simply various techniques utilizing daily news articles to incorporate, inspire, or transform them into theatrical pieces.

**Adaption** (particularly with old texts)— is a way of translating or making classic or historical theatre pieces relevant to today with commentary around modern social issues. This can manifest through scenic or background changes, updating the language/dialogue, gender-bending, subversive casting, etc. The best know example of this are probably works of Shakespeare being retold with settings, different time periods, casts of color or all womxn, etc.

**Drag**— Literally a performance of gender, so has the potential to be utilized as a form of activism and to provide social commentary. On the other hand sometimes drag, particularly more mainstream drag, has the potential to reinforce gender binaries, gender roles, and gender stereotypes. However, drag artists often perform with the intent to be provocative and create thought and dialogue around social issues.

**Drama Therapy**— Utilizing theatre and modes of performance as a tool to process oppression, pain, trauma, etc. to reach catharsis, clarity, and healing.

**Dramaturgy**— Even with in theatrical fields, some confusion about what exactly a dramaturg is and does. While it can vary depending on the production, a dramaturg’s role is to understand the play or theatre piece in depth, to research the history or socio-cultural context, to act as a go-between for other members of the production team, to lead critical discussions relevant to the material of the show, to ask questions, to reach out to communities (particularly if members in various communities could potentially have a stake to the subject matter). Dramaturgy is a wonderful way to facilitate activism and awareness in a theatre context.

**Talk Backs**— A discussion with the audience led by the actors, directors, dramaturg, etc. Opportunity to ask questions and critically engage with material after the performance is over. Conversation has the potential to make any kind of theatre revolutionary and talkbacks are a great method of accomplishing that.
Vocabulary from the Script, Fiddler on the Roof

Abraham- called by God (Yahweh) to leave his own country and journey to a new land and become the founder of a new nation, also the father of the Covenant between God and the Jewish people.

Anatevka- fictional pre-revolutionary Russian Village.

Breadwinner- colloquial (meaning informal, familiar way of speaking) term for the primary or only earner of income and money in a household.

Dowry- money/property brought by a bride (provided by her family) to her husband on their marriage.

Edict- official order or decree issued by some person or group with authority.

Esther, from the Book of Esther, also part of the Ketuvim. She is a Hebrew woman who become queen of Persia and thwarts a genocide of her people.

Evil Eye- concept that a person or supernatural being can bewitch or curse an individual merely by looking at them.

Gentiles- a person who is not Jewish.

Goliath- a giant, who was a champion warrior of the Philistines (an ancient peoples), who fought the Israelites. A young David, according to scripture, defeated Goliath in single combat.

Jericho- a Palestinian city; historically the first town attacked by the Israelites under a period of expansion. Led by Joshua, according to scripture, the walls fell down after the Israelites circled the city once a day for six days.

King David- King of Israel for 40 years. Under his rule, he united the people of Judah and led them into battle, successfully conquering a lot of land in and around Jerusalem. He paved the way for his son to build the Temple.

Kopek- unit of currency in Russia and some other Eastern European countries.

Kosher- food that is fit or clean according to Jewish dietary laws. Certain meats (such as pork or shellfish) are not permitted and acceptable meat slaughtered in a specific, prescribed way. Meat and dairy should not be served at the same meal.

Of course, there is a great deal of variation in observance of the dietary laws. Some are meticulous, some observe none or only some, etc.

Laden- heavily loaded or weighed down.

L’Chaim- a Hebrew toast meaning “to life.”

Mazeltov- literally translated as good luck, is generally meant as “congratulations.”

Messiah- promised savior of the Jewish nation prophesied in the Hebrew Bible. Can also mean a leader or savior of a certain religious group or cause.
Moses- one of Judaism’s great figures or prophets. Moses saved and led the Israelites out of Egypt, where they were slaves, and to the Holy Land. Received the Ten Commandments and is also thought to be the author of the torah, or the first five books of Hebrew Scripture (also called the Five Books of Moses).

Nazdrovia—(Russian) You’re welcome/not at all (this is the actual meaning in Russian, but it is often mistranslated as “cheers,” which is probably what happened in the script).

Obstinate- stubbornly refusing to change one’s mind or opinion etc. regardless of attempts to get one to do so.

Ordained- make someone a priest or minster or have holy power. Can also mean to decree something officially.

Pauper- a very poor person.

Pogrom- an organized, violent massacre, riot, or persecution of an ethnic or religious group. Historically it refers to attacks aimed at Jews in Eastern Europe or Russia, often with the encouragement of the government and police forces. Pogrom is a Russian word meaning “to wreak havoc or demolish violently.

Rabbi- Jewish religious teacher and interpreter of the Torah. In modern Judaism, a rabbi functions as a leader of the synagogue, a preacher and a minister for the community.

Radical- (adjective) advocating or something based on complete political/social reform or supporting an extreme section of a political party.

(noun) a person who advocates thorough political/social change.

Ruth- from the Book of Ruth, which is included in the Ketuvim. Ruth was a woman who accepted the god of the Israelites as her own, choosing to follow/practice Judaism.

Sabbath/Shabbat- Jewish day of worship and rest, commemorating God’s rest on the seventh day of creation and serves as a reminder of the deliverance from Egypt. Lasts from Sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday.

Synagogue- Jewish place of study and worship. After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, synagogues become the center of Jewish religious life.

Tallit/Prayer Shawl- A shawl with fringe or tassels at the four corners, as detailed in a command found in the Torah.

Theoretical- involving the theory (a system of ideas intended to explain something) of a subject or area of study.

Troth- loyalty when pledged in a solemn agreement.

Tsar- an emperor of Russia prior to 1917.

Zachava Zdarovia—(Russian) Cheers/to your health.
Controversy Around *Fiddler on the Roof*

Fiddler on the Roof was based on a series of stories written in Yiddish between 1894-1914. The Broadway musical was produced in 1964 and was a huge success, despite many directors, etc. turning the show down (many worried that it would be too “Jewish” to attract audiences in the mainstream).

Despite its popularity, elements of the show and production have been criticized. There were, of course, many changes made when adapting it for the stage. One controversial change is the portrayal of the Russian constable. In the musical, he as portrayed as more sympathetic and kindly, whereas in the original version, the constable is cruel and brutal to the Jewish inhabitants of the fictional town. People have also critiqued the musical as showing, overall, a stereotyped or sanitized version of the story.

However, still considered a culturally rich show, *Fiddler on the Roof*, became immensely popular—with it being the first Broadway to surpass 3000 performances. The writers did make an effort to keep the traditions and portrayals of faith accurate and many feel the show represents Jewish identity, community, and history.
Fiddler On the Roof Dramaturgical Packet

Vocabulary Terms

Caliphate- an Islamic state led by an Islamic steward with the title of caliph, a person considered a political-religious successor to the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

Chancellor- a senior state or legal official, or the head of the government in some European countries, such as Germany.

Civic- relating to a city or town, especially its administration; municipal.

Concentration camp- a “camp” in which people are detained or confined in usually harsh conditions and without legal norms/occurrences that are acceptable in constitutional democracy.

Consecrated- (of a church or land) having been made or declared sacred.

Diaspora- scattered population of people across a large geographical area, generally separate from their origin. In this context, refers to the dispersion of Jews beyond the land of Israel.

Galilee- The Galilee is a fertile, mountainous region in northern Israel.

Hellenistic- relating to Greek history, language, and culture from the death of Alexander the Great to the defeat of Cleopatra and Mark Antony in 31 BC.

Israelites- a confederation of Semitic-speaking tribes of the ancient Near East, who inhabited a part of Canaan during the tribal and monarchical period. (Canaan was a Semitic-speaking region in the Ancient Near East)

Judea- the Hebrew name for ancient kingdom.

Justification- the action of showing something to be right, sometimes used to excuse certain actions.

Persecution- hostility, violent, and/or ill-treatment, especially because of race or political or religious beliefs.

Proverbs- designed to teach wisdom, third section of the Hebrew Bible.

Psalms- collection of poems, hymns, and prayers that express the religious feeling of Jews throughout periods of their national history, book in the Hebrew Bible.

Rashidun Caliphate- the Islamic kingdom or state that lasted from 632-661, ruled by the successor four Caliphs, who succeed the Prophet Muhammad (viewed by Sunnis Muslims as the four “rightly-guided” rulers, while Shia Muslims do not consider the first three as legitimate... If you’re curious and want to know more come talk to me!)

Scapegoat- person who is blamed for the wrongdoings, mistakes, or faults of others.
Scripture- sacred writings of a religion.

Sect- a group of people with somewhat different religious beliefs (typically regarded as heretical) from those of a larger group to which they belong.

Semitic- a family of languages that includes Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic. Can also refer to people who speak such languages.

Suppression- action of forcibly stopping something (such as an activity or publication).

Sacred Texts

Tanakh: generally refers to the whole of Hebrew scripture, made of three parts

Torah: see below

Nevi’im: Writings/books from the Prophets

Ketuvim: means writings, made up of psalms, proverbs, poems, etc. made up of 12 books.

Torah: can mean the first 5 books of scriptures (the law of God as revealed to Moses more than 3000 years ago and recorded in those five books) or to the written or oral torah

Written torah: whole of Jewish scripture

Oral torah: ethical teaching of rabbis not originally recorded in the written torah, later written down, “oral torah” usually includes the Mishnah, Gemara, and the Talmud

Talmud: vast collection of the Jewish law and legend, composed of the Mishnah and the Gemara (see below). There are two different versions of the Talmud: the Babylonian Talmud and the Palestinian Talmud; also important to note that Talmud records a variety of opinions.

Palestinian Talmud: also known as Jerusalem Talmud, record of commentary from the rabbinic schools of Galilee during the 4th century; used in Italy and Egypt

Babylonian Talmud: longer, commentary from more than 1000 rabbis between 200 and 650 CE, completed in the seventh or eighth century; influential to Jews living in the Muslim Empire

Mishnah: collection of principles and details observances, referred to, to make decisions; the Mishnah forms the first part of the Talmud

Gemara: commentary from rabbis on the Mishnah, forms the second part of the Talmud.
BRANCHES OF JUDAISM

Orthodox Judaism: Seeks to preserve traditional or classic Judaism and regards itself as the only true form of Judaism. Following the Torah as fully authoritative, every aspect of life is to be governed by the book and strict observance of Shabbat, prayer, tradition, and dietary laws. Modern-day Orthodox Judaism exists in different forms, with some members also choosing to adapt to contemporary times and sometimes belong to both Orthodox and liberal synagogues.

Reform Judaism: Originating in Germany during the Enlightenment period (a period of scientific thought with emphasis on progress), Reform Judaism came about in a time of adaptation and a moving away from tradition. In order to achieve widespread acceptance, ending dietary laws and certain traditions was encouraged. Many also believed that the Torah should not be viewed as factual or binding, with ethical teachings of rabbis and prophets having more weight. Reform or Liberal Judaism is still evolving, with progress and the ability to change held as important characteristics.

Conservative Judaism: Conservative Judaism arose in response to Reform Judaism, with radical changes to traditional practices. While still preserving Jewish traditional practices, Conservative Judaism also allows for adjustments to fit modern views and trends.

Reconstructionist Judaism: Developed out of Conservative Judaism in the early 20th century. Based on the work of scholar and thinker Mordecai Kaplan (1881-1983) with the belief that Judaism is an evolving culture and emphasizes the importance of collective memory, ethics, culture, and religion. An example of this, is the creation of bat mitzvah celebration for girls in the 1920s.

The Hasidim: Known as Hasidic Judaism, there are many sects throughout the world. Community and community expectation is important for practicing Hasidic Jews, include strict ideas about what gender is and how different genders should act. Some groups have distinctive traditions around dressing with men wearing black hats and coats and wearing ear-locks. Methods of worship also often involves song and dance.
Basic Family and Social TRADITION(s)!

Bar-Mitzvah- at the age of 13, a boy, after intense study, reads from the Torah for the first time, marking his transition into becoming a responsible person, ready to observe religious practice. Bat-Mitzvah occurs when a girl turns 12, and while not traditional, it is being increasingly common to hold a ceremony.

The home is a central aspect of many people’s Jewish religious life. Children are included in major festivals and sometimes given major roles. Historically, traditionally it was the role of women to tend and maintain the house.

FESTIVALS: Passover (Pesach): marks the Exodus from Egypt led by Moses and freedom from slavery

Pentecost (Pentecost): celebrates the giving of the Torah to Moses from God on Mount Sinai.
Tabernacles (Sukkot): commemorates the time when God protected the people in the desert.

PRAYER- some pray three times a day—morning, afternoon, and evening—at home or at the synagogue. When praying, a man typically covers his head with an ordinary hat or a yarmelka or kippah (skull-cap). In the morning men wear a prayer shawl (tallit), which has tassels or fringes at the four corners and worn over the head or on the shoulders. Some also wear tefillin, small black leather boxes containing passages of scripture, on their foreheads or the upper left arm. In some areas, some women will also wear the tallit or tefillin.

See Kosher and Shabbat in Fiddler Vocab
**Caution: Complex History Ahead 😊**

**Early Developments and exiles:**

**MAIN POINTS**
- Judaism began approx. 6th century and established the Kingdom of Judea
- Judea’s geographical position meant that many other empires invaded, resulting in imprisonment and forced movement of Jews. Communities of exiles sprung up throughout regions.
- Belief of the Holy Temple (in Jerusalem) as the center of religious worship and life.

The early development or origins of Judaism are somewhat debated. The most popular narrative of Judaism begins in the late 6th century BCE, when the Persian Empire ruled the Middle East. In 586 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar II, King of the neo-Babylonian Empire, invaded Judea (ancient name for the mountainous region near what is contemporary day Palestine) and destroyed the city of Jerusalem, taking many people prisoner. The captives were taken to Babylon and elsewhere. Because of this, there sprang up many communities of exiles, in both Babylon and Egypt, who still considered themselves Judeans and continued to their practices religious traditions separately from beliefs of the areas they were inhabiting.

“Much of the fate of Israel was due to the position of its lands at the crossroads of the ancient world. BORDERED on the west by the Great Sea (the Mediterranean) and on the east by the searing Arabian deserts, it lay directly on a virtual land bridge between Egypt and the lands of Mesopotamia and Asia Minor. Not always a target for invasion itself, the land and its people were often the victims of armies passing through, marching in pursuit of the riches of Egypt” (Tvedtens).

Figure 1. Map of Israel and surrounding area.
Judeans of this period believed that there was one holy Temple where religious sacrifice and pilgrimage could be carried out (located in Jerusalem). While in exile, this was difficult if not impossible. Because of this, houses of worship (beitei knesset in Hebrew, synagogues in Greek) were established. Scribes were relied on as experts to understand and interpret the Torah. Scribes eventually evolved into the rabbis of rabbinic Judaism.

![Map of Alexander the Great’s Empire](image)

**Figure 2. Map of Alexander the Great’s Empire.**

**Returns and Separations:**

**MAIN POINTS:**

- Cyrus the Great of Persia invades and allows Hebrews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild temple
- Alexander the Great takes over everywhere, placing people under a Greek Empire, before breaking up into smaller regions after his death.
- Because many Hebrew communities were separated and existed under different empires, some groups developed differently—speaking different languages and having slight changes in tradition, etc.

In 539 BCE Cyrus ‘the Great’ of Persia attacked and took over the Babylonia Empire, and according to scripture, allowed the Hebrews to return from exile. Many religious leaders returned to Jerusalem to rebuild their Temple, while some exiles stayed.
In 333 BCE Alexander the Great expanded his empire founding Hellenistic kingdoms and inspiring Grecian influence across Egypt and what is present day Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, etc. The Judean community in Egypt and the Grecian style city of Alexandria adopted Greek as their language. After Alexander’s death, his empire broke up into smaller kingdoms, the largest being Macedonia, Egypt, and the Seleucids.

Essentially, throughout these periods of shifting empires, Jewish communities became separated, and while many continued traditional practices, they evolved under different circumstances.
and even spoke different languages. For example, the Jewish peoples isolated in Babylon became cut off from other Jewish communities, when the Parthian Empire rose to power in the third century BCE. The Jews in Babylon spoke Aramaic, while the Jewish communities of Hellenized kingdoms spoke Greek, although they continued to be united by common scripture and tradition.

Under Roman Rule:

**MAIN POINTS:**

- Roman Empire seized Jerusalem, resulting in the city being sacked and the Temple being desecrated (made unholy).
- A revolt occurred led by the Maccabee family, restoring the Temple, an event celebrated by the festival of Hanukkah.
- The Temple was destroyed a final time in 70 CE changing the ways practicing Jews worship.

The Roman Empire sought to take control of Jerusalem (and most places actually, but specifically Jerusalem) under the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Objecting to Jewish opposition, he sent his troops to sack Jerusalem and attack the Jewish faith, including by performing Roman rituals in the Temple (which was a great affront). Eventually, a group of people, led by the Maccabee family led a full-scale revolt and seized Jerusalem and the Temple back. This victory, in which they re-consecrated the Temple, is celebrated today as Hanukkah, or Festival of Lights.

Despite a period of relative freedom in the region, the Roman Empire eventually annexed Judea in 63 BCE. They installed Herod ‘the Great’ as “King of the Jews” in 40 BCE. There was tension and several attempted revolts during this period of Roman rule. In 66 CE, a major revolt was staged against Rome, with initial success followed by brutal suppression. Jerusalem was taken and the Temple was destroyed in 70 CE, destroying previous ways of worship. The Temple had been central to Jewish beliefs; The Temple and the connected priesthood would no longer serve as a unifying force or focus for Judaism.
Without the Temple as a central symbol with which to orient worship, Jewish communities had
to develop new practices. Throughout this time periods many different varieties of Judaism arose,
however the most impactful was the formation of Rabbinic Judaism. A school was started in Galilee,
with formal teachers going by the name rabbi. This school gained followers and were looked to for
instructions and advice (this is mostly what modern Judaism is descended from). Most other forms of
Judaism gradually died out. Jewish Christianity survived into the second century CE.

Revolts against Roman rule continued. A revolt in 132 CE was led by Simon ben Kosiba (or
Simon bar Kokhba, ‘Son of a Star’) protested the establishment of a new Roman city on the ruins of
Jerusalem. Kosiba claimed to be the messiah and was supported by a great rabbi scholar, gaining
support for his cause. However, the uprising was brutally put down and after the completed
construction of the new city, Jews were forbidden to enter.

![Map of Jewish Diaspora and movement 587 BCE-300 CE.](image)

Figure 4. Map of Jewish Diaspora and movement 587 BCE-300 CE.

Around this time, Romans gave the name Palestine to this area or country. A man named
Simeon ben Gamaliel II rose to power within the Jewish communities and councils within this area and
became the first Palestinian Patriarch, which theoretically gave him religious authority over all Jews within the Roman world. His son, Judah I or Rabbi HaQadosh, was a dedicated and noted scholar. It was during this time that the Mishnah was recorded, collected, and published. The Palestinian Patriarchate lasted until 425 until the Romans executed the current leader and dissolved the council.

**Christiantiy, Islam, Judaism, and the division of Rome**

**MAIN POINTS:**

- After the Roman Empire converted to Christianity, persecution of Jewish peoples rose. Because of the persecution, when Muslims invaded the area, the Jews welcomed them.
- Life under Islamic rule was improved for people practicing Judaism, as they were allowed to keep worshiping and given special privileges as they too followed the Old Testament.

Constantine, who ruled the Roman Empire from 306-337 CE, converted to Christianity, which had a negative impact on Jewish peoples living in the Roman Empire. Judaism was not made illegal, however as tensions grew between Jewish and Christian beliefs, so did persecution.

(Side note: The Roman Empire was split in half in 285 CE, and although it was reunited and then split again, these two parts eventually became what we know today as the Western Roman Empire and the Eastern Roman Empire. The Eastern Roman Empire or the Byzantine Empire survived until 1453 CE, while the Western half collapsed around 476 CE.)

Figure 5. The division and resulting two empires, circa 400 CE.
In Babylon, the leader of the Jewish exiles was known as an *exilarch* (head of the exiles). It was a hereditary (passed down as inheritance, to offspring) position and was recognized by the state. However, relations became strained because of poor treatment by the Persian leaders, resulting in the Jewish people welcoming the Muslims conquerors (the Rashidun Caliphate) as they invaded the region. After the rise of Islam, Muslim Caliphates sought to conquer the surrounding area(s), with many Jews coming under Muslim rule. Under the Caliphates, non-Muslims were taxed rather than forced to convert. Because of the jiyaz tax, for the most part life was much improved, in the sense that there was less outright persecution—if you could pay the tax, you could practice your religion freely. In addition, originally just Jews and Christians were granted special status as they were People of the Book (although over the years, other religions were included). Because of more freedoms, as well as collaboration, this marked a time of flourishing between Jewish and Muslim art and scholarship.

![Map of three Caliphates and the lands they conquered (622-750)](image)

In Spain, ‘Sephardic’ Judaism was developed, which has its own synagogue rituals and a Spanish-Jewish dialect, Ladino. Some Jewish peoples rose to influential positions at court and helped Sephardic scholarship to flourish.
The heads of Babylonian Jewish academics, who were called Gaons, were responsible for ensuring the Babylonian Talmud was widely accepted and celebrated. However, during the mid 11th century, Jewish scholars in Europe became more important than the Gaons. A French Rabbi and scholar, known by his initials as Rashi, produced commentaries on both the Bible and the Talmud, which (along with notes from his successors) are still included and printed in the Talmud today.

**Anti-Jewish Sentiments**

**MAIN POINTS:**
- Horrible lies about Jewish people were spread and believed, becoming commonplace in Christian Europe.
- These beliefs led to violence and forced conversion of Jewish folks by Christians.

From the 10th century onward, anti-Jewish sentiments became commonplace throughout Christian Europe. Jewish peoples were murdered during the Crusades, as Christian armies marched their way to the ‘Holy Land’ and then captured Jerusalem.

Two lies were circulated throughout Europe around this period—that of ‘blood libel’ and ‘libel desecration of the host.’ The blood libel horrifically claimed that Jews committed ritual murder, using the blood of Christian children during Passover. The libel desecration of the host claimed that Jewish people stole ‘the host’—the Christian consecrated bread of the eucharist, believed to represent or be the body of Christ—and stabbed or burned to reenact the crucifixion of Christ.

While these are obviously false and unfounded lies, many people used them as an excuse or justification of violence and persecution. Jews were expelled from England in 1290 and expelled from France in 1306. In southern Italy, between 1290-1293, forced conversions and murders were inflicted upon Jewish communities. A number of massacres occurred in France in 1348. Jews were falsely blamed for causing the Black Death, a plague that killed more than one third of the population in
Europe. These are but a few examples. As a people, Jews have been persecuted, scapegoated, and massacred throughout history.

**Relations with Islam**

**MAIN POINTS:**

- After Muslims conquered part of Spain, their brutal treatment of Jewish people, led many Jews to flee to northern Spain—where they were expelled in 1492.
- Continued persecution and violence led to immigration and movement of Jewish people.

In the 12th century, Muslims invaded Spain from North Africa in response to Christians attempting to recapture Spain. Contrary to previous interactions, the Muslim treatment of the Jewish people was not as tolerant as in the past (keep in mind that this is a different area and time, so should not expect it to be the same). Because of this, many Jewish people fled into the north part of Spain and were initially welcomed. With many livelihoods excluded from them, many took on jobs that were forbidden to Christians, for example moneylending. The tolerance did not last and attacks and forced conversions reached a peak in 1492, when the Jewish people were given the choice of converting or leaving (which resulted in thousands fleeing to other parts of Europe and beyond).

During the 16th and 17th centuries, the Muslim Ottoman Empire took over Palestine, Egypt, and pushed into Europe. For Jews under Ottoman rule, conditions were less difficult than in parts of Christian Europe (but were still subject to abuse by rulers). Non-Sephardic Jewish people living Europe were known as Ashkenazi, and Ashkenazi Jews, especially in Germany, adopted their own dialect known as Yiddish. Although they continued to experience anti-Jewish riots and treatments, they were a bit more protected. This was perhaps in part because skills such as money-lenders and trading were recognized as useful. That being said, there were still several noted massacres throughout the 1600s.
A popular movement known as Hasidism was developed in the 18th century and emphasized an individual experience of the divine. Because the movement focused on the personal and everyday it was more accessible to ordinary or poorer people who could not afford to devote long hours to study as was required by rabbinical Judaism. Hasidic life emphasized passionate devotion to God through prayer, singing, and dancing, as well as notions of religious joy. There are still many forms of Hasidic Judaism today (see Branches of Judaism).

After the early 17th century, more immigration into the cities of Europe and America occurred. While Judaism was still targeted, there was a growing tolerance in many cases. It is important to note, however, throughout history because of abuse, Jewish people have been forced to move or even hid their faith in order to protect themselves/their families from violence or death.

_Shoah (Catastrophe)—The Holocaust_

Please read all of this section.

At the end of World War I, Germany became a democratic republic under a constitution made in 1919, and faced a period of economic instability during the Great Depression. With the extreme instability, both Communists and their fascist rivals, the Nazi Party, gained significant support. The Nazis’ linked Jews with Communists and preached the superiority of an “Aryan Race” (which referred to Nordic people as a master race). On January 1933, Adolf Hitler was appointed as Chancellor. Once in power, Hitler and the Nazi Party suspended the constitution and eliminated other political parties. Book burnings and mass imprisonment of trade union leaders and dissident (opposing or disagreeing) scientists, scholars, artists, etc. began to occur as well. The first concentration camp opened in 1933 and was used for political prisoners (see Types of Camps below). The SS, Hitler’s elite security forces, were expanded in 1934 and took over many of police activities and duties.
After the President of Germany died in 1934, Hitler became the head of state and required government officials and military members to swear an oath of loyalty to him. In 1935, the anti-Semitic and racist Nuremberg Laws were enacted by the Nazi government. These laws criminalized sexual liaisons or relations between Jews and non-Jews and prevented Jews from participating in civic life. In 1938, The Gestapo secret police took control of Jewish community structures and forced Jews to declare and register their property. Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass, occurred on 9 November 1938. The Nazis organized a pogrom and onslaught against the Jewish people—Nazi mobs killed, looted, vandalized and set fire to homes, schools, shops, and synagogues. The Nazi government blamed the Jews for the attacks committed against them, including fining them and passing a series of strict anti-Semitic laws. After Kristallnacht, Nazi officials conducted mass arrests of male Jews throughout the country.

Figure 7. Destruction after Kristallnacht.

Nazi Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939. As the invading forces swept through, they forced Jews to clear rubble, give up their jewelry, etc. In some cases, they were forced to clean
floors and lavatories with their prayer shawls and had their beards/side-locks removed. After 1939, Nazis opened numerous forced labor camps where prisoners were mal-treated, neglected, and even sometimes used as medical experiments. It was around this period that Nazis also began forcing Jewish people to uproot and move into designated areas, known as ghettos. Many ghettos were sealed off from the outside and resulted in a massive amount of people being brutally forced to live on a much smaller portion of land.

### Types of Camps

Many people refer to all of the Nazi incarceration sites during the Holocaust as *concentration camps*. The term concentration camp is used very loosely to describe places of incarceration and murder under the Nazi regime, however, not all sites established by the Nazis were concentration camps. Nazi-established sites include:

- **Concentration camps**: For the detention of civilians seen as real or perceived “enemies of the Reich.” Also used to eliminate peoples away from the view of the public.
- **Forced-labor camps**: In forced-labor camps, the Nazi regime brutally exploited the labor of prisoners for economic gain and to meet labor shortages. Prisoners lacked proper equipment, clothing, nourishment, or rest.
- **Transit camps**: Transit camps functioned as temporary holding facilities for Jews awaiting deportation. These camps were usually the last stop before deportations to a killing center.
- **Prisoner-of-war camps**: For Allied prisoners of war, including Poles and Soviet soldiers.
- **Killing centers**: Established primarily or exclusively for the assembly-line style murder of large numbers of people immediately upon arrival to the site. There were 5 killing centers for the murder primarily of Jews. The term is also used to describe “euthanasia” sites for the murder of disabled patients.

Table 1. From the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

After invading the Soviet Union in 1941, the systematic massacre of Russian Jews took place, led by “murder squads.” Following this invasion, more camps were built, along with the expansion of pre-existing camps. Killing centers or death camps, designed for efficient mass murder, began opening in late 1941 as well. The Nazi policy of Jewish extermination, known as the final solution, was implemented in 1941 and resulted in the murder of an estimated 6 million Jews (as well as 5 million non-Jews) in concentration camps within the next four years.
By September 1942, Nazi Germany had conquered much of Europe. But, resistance spread throughout Europe. Despite the risk and the results Jews from the Warsaw ghetto risked their lives to fight back, non-Jewish people took in and hid Jewish folk—helping them smuggle their way to freedom.

World War II ended in 1945 and while trials and reparations (making amends for a wrong by paying money or otherwise helping) occurred, the terrible events, the trauma, and massive loss of life are still felt by the Jewish community.

Jewish Holocaust survivors and refugees sought a new life, and through a lot of complex events (come talk to me if interested) the State of Israel was declared. Israel was recognized and admitted to the United Nations in 1949.

This memory of collective tragedy has also bonded both religious and non-religious Jewish people together across the world, finding healing in remembering and honoring their histories, communities, and traditions.

**Assignment: conduct a bit of research (we will briefly go over research techniques) and come ready to share an event or article about positive, Jewish community action.**
DISCUSSION ONE: Why is theatre significant or important to you?
What do you know about Judaism?
What would you like to learn more about?
How will knowledge help you build this world and your character?

These are rough notes from the one discussion I was able to have with the kids before everything changed. I had 30-40 minutes to fill and was worried that my four questions wouldn’t fill the time—we never got past the first one: “What is the importance and significance of theatre and performance?” Instead the students were engaged and passionate. They used the space to speak to things they loved and found valuable about theatre. It was inspiring.

musical theatre, Shakespeare history (diff societies developed different ways) art form (diff from other types—focus on so many things, bring so much to it, so much going on)
Put all in when get over being self-conscious
watch things/issues acted out on stage
good way to find self, taught to be self-conscious
most direct art form, whatever is going on onstage is going on in the audience, make audience realize thing without explicitly saying.
like being at theater
if someone puts in all, you can make the audience feel really strong emotion, emotional investment,
even just 10 sec on stage, make people feel, explore characters imagine what its like to be in that characters shoes. Fun, also community and friendships, where 100% accepted
Meet new people build friendships confidence
be my self, gone through bullying, once got back into be more self, love process. formed connections through theatre
self-confidence and feel like no matter what people say
like things can connect to, can connect to theatre, especially fiddler (cuz my history) storytelling and music
body image, why does no actor look like me, feel seen when see people that look like self
all met closet friends and all friends here, magical feeling on stage after all the work and everyone is watching you, working towards
live theatre powerful bc not like anything else, sit there in the story theatre
evolution of theatre, step into character, from first day
history that actually happened, you can step into the shoes of people who have experienced, empathetic knowing, second nature
community is so great, knows what it feels like to be awkward or make mistake, understand, comfort, everyone loves you, know what it likes
bonds that you form stronger and quicker than normal friendships, male difference particularly in theatre, roles of what “guy” or “girl” is, bullied, makes you who you are
not knowing anyone, come to baay, one day and know people, accepted, in a lot of theatre places feels like a competition, baay is less so,
self growth process, self improvement, scared, but then when performing, feel the feeling and disconnect from scared feeling, process
casting bonding
still looking for reason but incorporates pieces from all what everyone has said
loud and crazy here, but not at school, when here everyone is a theatre kid
DISCUSSION TWO: How do we view history? What do you think about the importance of knowing or learning about a culture’s/religion’s history?

Do you have any important questions based on the readings?

Anything you are curious or would like to know more about? I may not know, but I can research!

DISCUSSION THREE: Judaism in Fiddler on the Roof and problems presented by this piece? Why were changes made for developing this production for Broadway?

DISCUSSION FOUR: Is there anything that you see in Fiddler on the Roof that you see today? Why are people intolerant? What can we do?

DISCUSSION FIVE: Revisit importance of theatre. What makes a good discussion? How can we lead a good discussion with the audience? What should we be prepared for?
Bibliography


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