

# PERFORMING JEWISH IDENTITY: A HISTORY OF JEWS ON THE AMERICAN STAGE

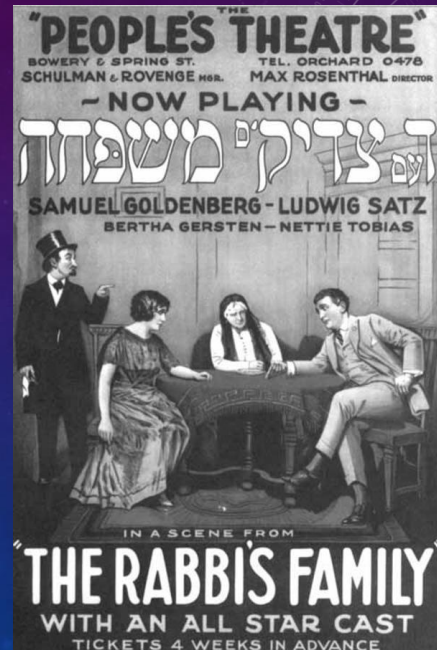
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## BIRTH OF YIDDISH AMERICAN THEATRE 1860s-1920s

- Vaudeville
  - *voix de ville*



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## JOE WEBER AND LEW FIELDS

### Variety show excerpt:

**Weber:** "Who vass dat lady I seen you wid last night?"

**Fields:** "Dat vass no lady, dat vass mine vife!"



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## TRADITION OF THE JEWISH COMEDIC DUO

- *Schlemiel*
- *Schlimazel*



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## HEBREW LETTER "SHIN": ש

SHMENDRICK: A SCHLEMIEL IN TRAINING, A FOOL

SHLUMP: SLOW, INEFFECTUAL PERSON

SHMO: ORDINARY OR SIMPLE MAN

SCHMALTZ: OVERLY SENTIMENTAL

SHTIK: CLOWNING, COMEDIC GIMMICK

SHTUNK: SOMEONE WHO SMELLS UNPLEASANT

SHMUCK: AN OBNOXIOUS, DETESTABLE PERSON

SHLOCK: OF LOW QUALITY OR VALUE

SHYSTER: A FRAUDULENT BUSINESS MAN

SHIKSEH: NON-JEWISH WOMAN

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# THE YIDDISH THEATRE, 1880S

WHAT WAS RETAINED?  
WHAT WAS SACRIFICED?

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## LANGUAGE

1. Hebrew

2. Yiddish

\*Significance of Language?

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# MUSIC

- Klezmer



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## WHAT WAS SACRIFICED?

AMERICANIZATION AND SECULARIZATION

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## “GOLDENE MEDINA”



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## JEWISH THEATRE: IN SEARCH OF A NEW COMMUNITY



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## GROWTH OF JEWISH THEATRE



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ABRAHAM GOLDFADEN



JACOB GORDIN

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## SHAKESPEARE IN YIDDISH



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## DECLINE OF YIDDISH THEATRE

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THE GREAT DEPRESSION, 1929

NATIONAL ORIGINS QUOTA ACT,  
1924



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1930S—JEWISH OWNERSHIP OF BROADWAY:  
THE FOREFRONT OF ACTIVISM AND THEATRE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Historical Context?



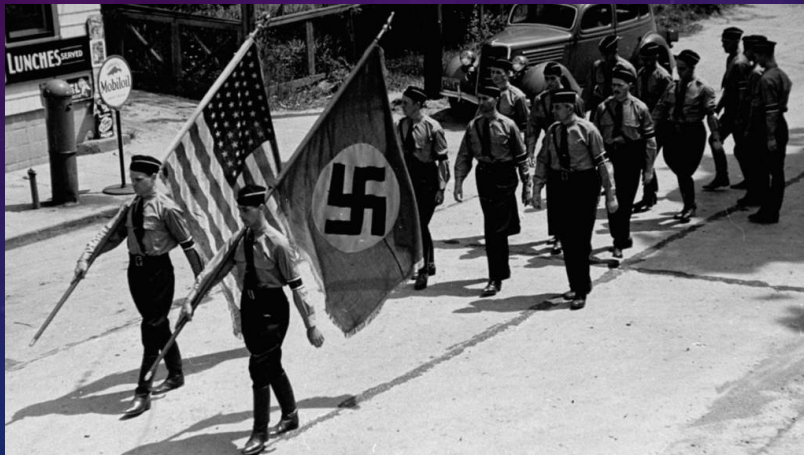
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## FEDERAL THEATRE PROJECT, 1935-1939

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## FASCISM ABROAD AND ANTISEMITISM AT HOME



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## NOTABLE JEWS ON BROADWAY (1930S)

- Al Jolson
- Irving Berlin
- Fanny Brice
- George Gershwin
- Lorenz Hart
- Jerome Kern
- Richard Rodgers
- Oscar Hammerstein



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## RUSSIAN REVOLUTION AND JEWISH LEFTIST THEATRE



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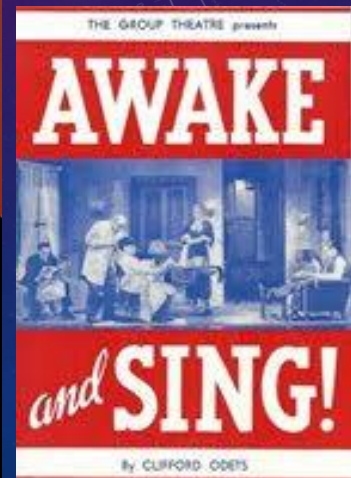
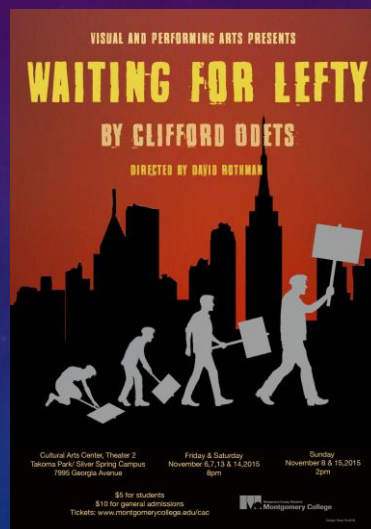


## AMERICAN LABOR MOVEMENT



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## CLIFFORD ODETS

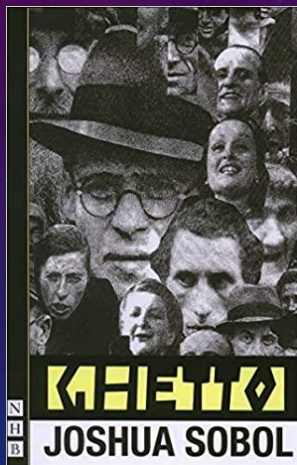


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## THE LATE 1940'S TO THE 60'S: "THE GOLDEN AGE" OF MUSICALS

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### JOSHUA SOBEL'S GHETTO (1984)



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## RICHARD ROGERS AND OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II *OKLAHOMA!* (1943)



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## U.S. OFFICE OF WAR INFORMATION

- Instructed theatre producers to “depict democracy by showing persons of different race, religion and economic status mingling on even terms ... in settings of everyday life.”

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## RODGERS AND HAMMERSTEIN'S *THE SOUND OF MUSIC* (1959)



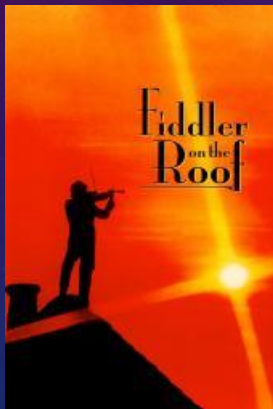
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- JEROME ROBBINS AND LEONARD BERNSTEIN  
*WEST SIDE STORY* (1961)



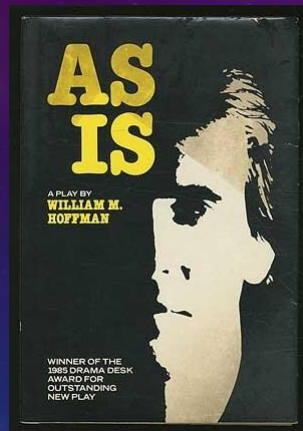
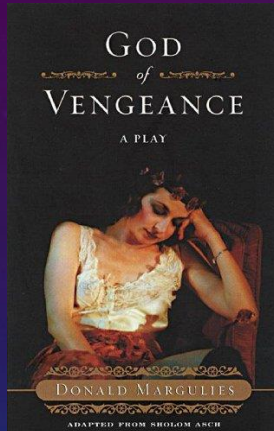
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RETURN TO CULTURAL ROOTS:  
*FIDDLER ON THE ROOF* (1964)



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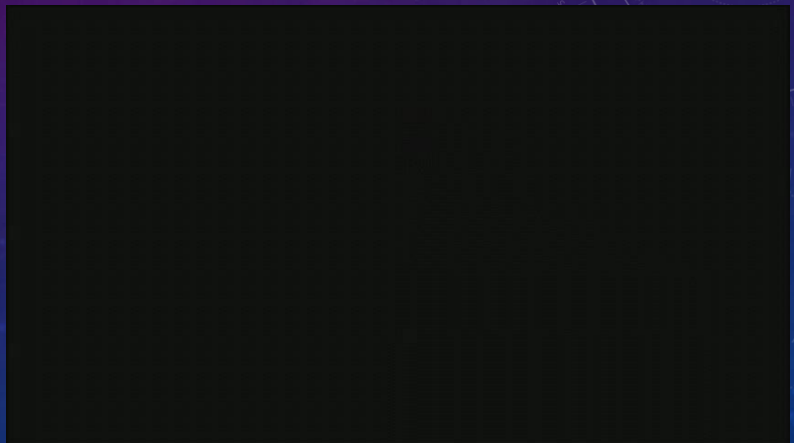
## Jewish Writers and LGBTQ Plays



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## STEPHEN SCHWARTZ'S *WICKED* (2004)



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