

Judgment at Nuremberg

An interview with Susan Albert Loewenberg, Producing Director of L.A. Theatre Works, on the production *Judgment at Nuremberg*. Ms. Loewenberg is currently a member of the Board of Directors of The Center for Public Integrity and a Fellow of the Los Angeles Institute for the Humanities at USC.

Q: *Judgment at Nuremberg* is a play based on the war tribunals after WWII. It was a multi-country effort (led by the United States) to hold Nazi war criminals accountable for their crimes against humanity. Does the play demonstrate, and at what cost, that justice was served?

SL: The play does not take a stance on history, nor does it come to a conclusion on whether justice was served at Nuremberg. Rather, it presents a moral argument—what is “justice” for something as horrific as the Holocaust? The play demonstrates what it takes to have that conversation, and how important it is for the conversation to be had. The play asks, “what is justice in today’s global narrative?” The play also explores whether an independent judiciary can be truly independent in a politically charged environment.

Q: The play explores the aftermath of one of the darkest times in world history. What makes this piece, which is set more than half a century ago, relevant today? What lessons were learned or ignored?

SL: The Nuremberg trials forever affected our notions of jurisprudence, retribution, and vengeance, and there seems to be no more timely moment for them to be discussed than right now. In today’s world, how can we possibly talk about what is “fair” or “right” when grappling with genocide, police brutality, and acts of terrorism? In order to maintain stability, rules must be upheld, and retributions inflicted—the trials taught us

this. But when unspeakable horror happens, what is good and what is bad becomes blurred. The play defines the role of judgment and personal responsibility in an uncertain world, where “right” and “wrong” have lost definite meaning.

Q: One of the most riveting moments of the play occurs when a German citizen appears to be shocked that her government was committing such horrible atrocities. How is the idea of shared community and responsibility in a civilized society dealt with in the play?

SL: The play asks whether it is a person’s responsibility as the member of a community to speak out against that community and the leaders of that community when they see wrongdoing. If that wrongdoing continues, who should be held accountable? Even if you don’t actively participate in the act of wrongdoing, if you don’t stand up and fight it, is that the same as participating?

Q: This year, L.A. Theatre Works has toured all over the country with *Judgment at Nuremberg*—large cities, small communities. What has been the reaction to the content of the play?

SL: In preparation for the trials, members of the Nuremberg court assembled a public record of all WWII and Holocaust war crimes, which Chief Prosecutor Robert Jackson said must be created or else “future generations would not believe how horrible the truth was.” Coincidentally, in response to our production, we’ve heard many young people (millennials) say, “I had no idea how awful it was.” We feel it’s very important that this story is being told right now, and that it continues to be told for generations to come. We as a society must never forget.

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L.A. Theatre Works
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