

JANUARY 17 - FEBRUARY 12, 2017 | QUADRACCI POWERHOUSE

Play
Guide

DISGRACED

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER **Judy Hansen** | ASSOCIATE PRODUCERS **Catherine and Buddy Robinson**
A CO-PRODUCTION WITH GUTHRIE THEATER AND MCCARTER THEATRE



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Written by **Ayad Akhtar**
Directed by **Marcela Lorca**

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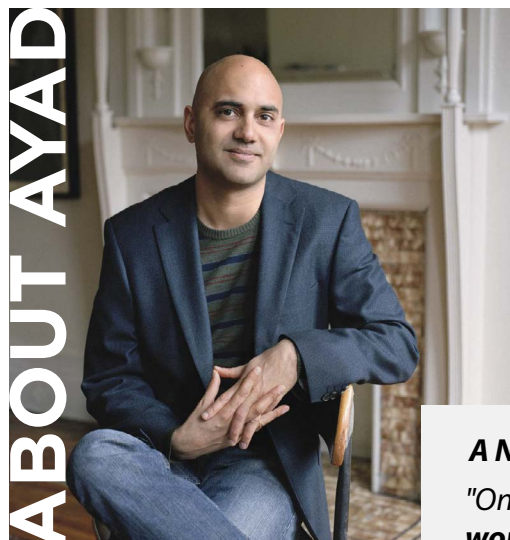
MILWAUKEE REPERTORY THEATER'S MISSION STATEMENT

Milwaukee Repertory Theater ignites positive change in the **cultural, social, and economic vitality of its community** by creating **world-class theater** experiences that entertain, provoke, and **inspire meaningful dialogue** among an audience representative of Milwaukee's rich diversity.

WORLD-CLASS THEATER

SYNOPSIS

Set in New York's Upper East Side, *Disgraced* is the didactic story of Amir Kapoor, an American-born, Muslim-raised Manhattan lawyer, and his Caucasian wife, Emily, an artist whose work is greatly influenced by Islamic art. When Amir and Emily host a dinner party with their respective work acquaintances, Jory, an African-American female attorney, and Isaac, her Jewish husband, the conversation quickly begins to challenge their respective outlooks on identity. Amir has long rejected his youthful notions of heritage and faith, but when his nephew, Abe, convinces him to support a Muslim man facing religious persecution, Amir finds himself in a battle of his own. The Pulitzer Prize-winning play addresses religion, race, institutionalized oppression and the fluidity of identity.



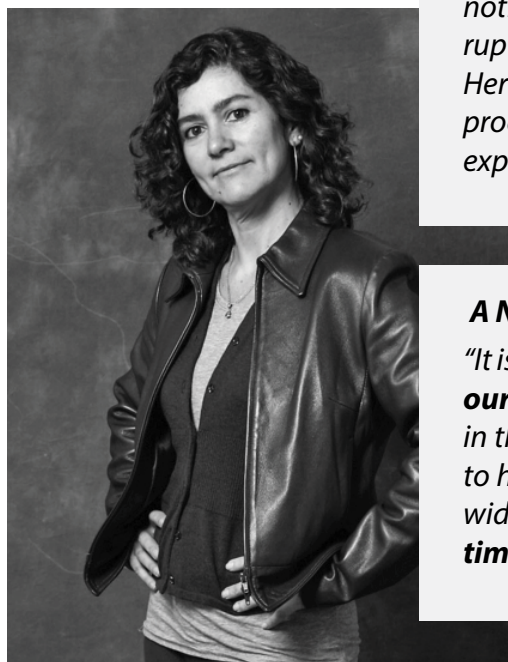
Ayad Akhtar was born in New York City and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He is a graduate of both Columbia and Brown Universities, with degrees in Theater and Film Directing. He is the author of *American Dervish*, which has been published in over 20 languages and was the 2012 Book of the Year for several publications, including Toronto's Globe and Mail. Akhtar is also a playwright and screenwriter; his stage play *Disgraced* won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. As a screenwriter, he was nominated for an Independent Spirit Award for Best Screenplay for *The War Within*. Ayadakhtar.com

A NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

"One of the central axis points of the American experience is **rupture from the old world, and renewal of the self in the new one**. For seven or eight generations, this notion is central to being American. We celebrate the renewal; we do not mourn the rupture. *Disgraced* is about the gap which is created by not mourning the rupture. Here is a character (Amir) who cannot celebrate renewal, and is caught in the process. It presents a series of contradictions. Those contradictions are the experience I want the audience to be confronted with."

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR, MARCELA LORCA

"It is my goal through *Disgraced* to **invite an audience to empathize with each of our characters**, and to not only root for the winners but to hold the ones who lose in their hearts, to be able to understand them. A play like *Disgraced* has the power to hold mirrors to us, invite us to embrace complexities, ponder our contradictions, widen our view of others, **and invite us to practice empathy, one character at a time, and hopefully one audience member at a time.**"



CAST



JASON BABINSKY
Isaac



JANIE BROOKSHIRE
Emily



MABOUD EBRAHIMZADEH
Amir



IMRAN SHEIKH
Abe



AUSTENE VAN
Jory

CREATIVE



Marcela Lorca
Director

James Youmans, *Scenic Designer*

Ana Kuzmanic, *Costume Designer*

Rui Rita, *Lighting Designer*

Scott Edwards, *Sound Designer*

JC Clementz, *Casting Director*

McCorkle Casting, *New York Casting*

Daniella Wheelock, *Assistant Director*

Jessica Connelly, *Stage Manager*

Audra Kuchling, *Assistant Stage Manager*

Kyle Winklemann, *Stage Management Resident*

PRODUCTION HISTORY (ABBREVIATED)



American Theater Company's Disgraced by Ayad Akhtar (Photo credit: Michael Brosilow)



Disgraced at the Guthrie Theater. (Photo credit: Dan Norman)

Fall 2010: First public performance in a reading sponsored by AracaWorks at the Black Box Theatre in the Harold and Miriam Steinberg Center for Theatre (part of New York's Roundabout Theatre Company complex)

January 30, 2012: *Disgraced* premieres at the American Theater Company in Chicago directed by Kimberly Senior, receives four Jeff Award nominations and wins for Best New Work

October 22, 2012: Off-Broadway debut at the Lincoln Center, under the direction of Kimberly Senior; receives an Obie Award and is nominated for the John Gassner Award by the Outer Critics Circle

April 2013: *Disgraced* receives the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for Drama

May 22, 2014: Off West End Debut at the Bush Theatre

October 23, 2014: Broadway debut at the Lyceum Theatre again under the direction of Kimberly Senior (starring Josh Radnor, *How I Met Your Mother*), runs 20 weeks; receives a Tony Award nomination for Best Play

2015-2016 Season: *Disgraced* is the most produced play in America with 18 productions throughout the US

February 9, 2015: Continental Europe Premiere at Theater Drachengasse, Vienna, Austria

September 12, 2015: Returns to Chicago at the Goodman Theatre in a co-production with Seattle Repertory Theater and Berkeley Repertory Theater (directed by Kimberly Senior)

March 4, 2016: Germany English Language debut at The English Theatre Frankfurt

July 16, 2016: Debuts at the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, a co-production between McCarter Theater, Guthrie Theater and Milwaukee Repertory Theater

CULTURAL SOCIAL ECONOMIC VITALITY OF THE COMMUNITY



MISSION STATEMENT

To be an exemplary American Muslim Community that serves all of God's creation with mercy, justice and respect of human dignity.

In July of 1976, the Islamic Association of Greater Milwaukee established themselves as the first officially registered Muslim organization with the State of Wisconsin. Since its origin, the IAGM functions to serve the Muslim community through public lectures, holiday arrangements, and community holiday prayers. The association has grown exponentially since its creation, and has expanded to three main worship areas throughout the Greater Milwaukee Area, including the establishment of the Salam Elementary School, a thriving Islamic School accredited by both the Wisconsin's Religious and Independent Schools Association, and the prestigious North Central Association.

The Islamic Society of Milwaukee is part of the worldwide community of Muslims which are estimated to number 1.5 billion people*. The most populous Muslim country is Indonesia. 300 million Muslims live in countries where Islam is not the majority religion. The country that has the largest number of Muslims, but is not a Muslim majority country, is India. In the United States, a credible estimate of the number of Muslims is between six to eight million. In Southeastern Wisconsin, there are an estimated 15,000 Muslims.

"The Muslim community in the Milwaukee area has grown substantially since the ISM first purchased the Islamic Center on 13th and Layton in 1982. Those attending Friday prayer services in 1982 often numbered less than 50 people. Today, the number in the main facility on South 13th Street exceeds 1500."

-ISLAMIC SOCIETY OF MILWAUKEE, "HISTORY"

To learn more, visit their page: <http://www.ismonline.org/>

In March of 2016, Janan Najeeb introduced readers of Shepherd Express to a diverse group of Muslims in Milwaukee in her article "**Muslims in Milwaukee: Their Voices.**" To read more about the speech therapist, personal trainer, real-estate agent, firefighter, pharmacist, physician, professor, or any other Milwaukee community members, go to: <http://shepherdexpress.com/article-27477-muslims-in-milwaukee-their-voices-news-features.html>



MISSION STATEMENT

The Jewish Museum Milwaukee is dedicated to preserving and presenting the history of the Jewish people in southeastern Wisconsin and celebrating the continuum of Jewish heritage and culture. The history of American Jews is rooted in thousands of years of searching for freedom and equality. We are committed to sharing this story and the life lessons it brings with it, so that we may enhance the public's awareness and appreciation of Jewish life and culture.

The Jewish community began to establish themselves in Milwaukee dating back to 1842 but it was not until 1984 that the Milwaukee Jewish Archives grew out of the "Roots Committee" of the Women's Division of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation. Through active archive collecting, the group began to mount public exhibits, lead tours of the "old neighborhood", and eventually the development of the Museum. After establishing the location (first floor of the Helfaer Community Service Building), with the support of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation and the Jewish Community Foundation, and after an intensive training of docents, the Jewish Museum of Milwaukee opened in 2008.

For more information, please reference <http://jewishmuseummilwaukee.org> or <http://www.milwaukeejewish.org/>

To learn more about The Rep's previous collaboration with the Jewish museum, visit <http://jewishmuseummilwaukee.org/stitching-historys-new-beginning/>

MILWAUKEE REP EDUCATION: EMPATHY AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

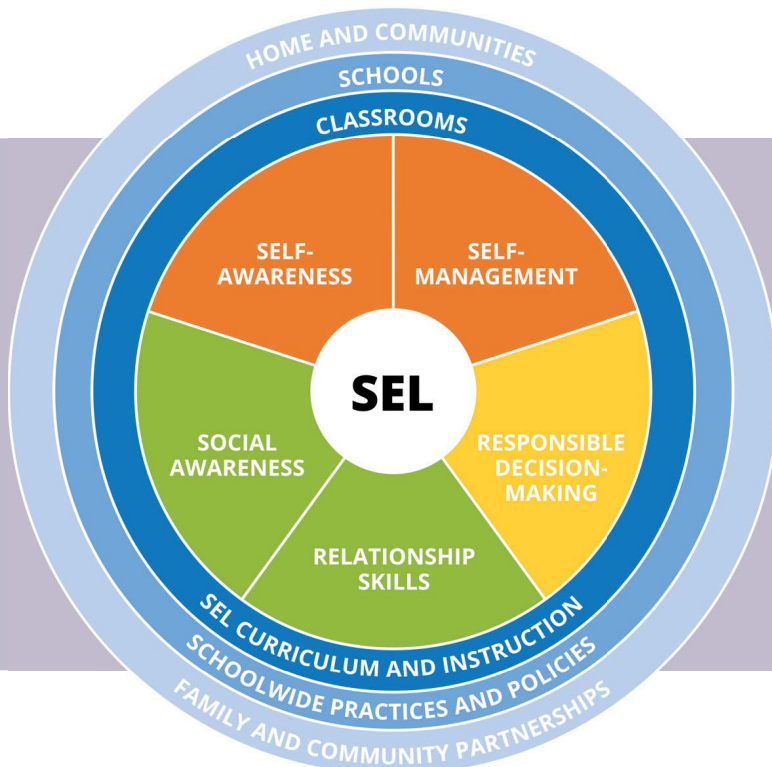
Milwaukee Rep Education Programs are designed **to take students beyond** the experience of watching a live performance **to learning about the art form**, making **connection to their school's curriculum and developing life skills** as they immerse themselves in the magic of theater. Our student programming gives students more than just exposure to theater. The Rep's physically active, multi-sensory teaching approach gives students more avenues for deeply engaging with the text. The Rep's Education Programming includes Teen Council, Reading Residency, Student Matinees, After School Programs, Backstage Tours, and a variety of other workshops tailor-made to meet school's needs.

REP EDUCATION HAS THREE MAIN GOALS:

1 TO INCREASE
LITERACY SKILLS,

2 TO INCREASE SOCIAL
EMOTIONAL LEARNING,

3 AND TO INCREASE
THEATER APPRECIATION.



*Social Emotional Learning, as outlined by the CASEL Standards (the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning), is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary **to understand and manage emotions**, set and **achieve positive goals**, and **feel and show empathy for others**, establish and maintain **positive relationships**, and make **responsible decisions**.*

For *Disgraced*, Rep Education is hosting three specifically designated **Youth Nights** where youth participants will include Teen Council members, youth from After-School Programming and other members of youth councils throughout the Greater Milwaukee Area. Youth Nights will include a **pre-show dinner and a pre-show workshop with an actor from *Disgraced*, followed by participation in the Ziedler Center Facilitated Dialogues**. The Ziedler Center Facilitated Dialogues will allow youth an opportunity to respond to and reflect on topics inspired by the show with other community members attending the public performance, fostering an intergenerational experience. The experiences are meant to elevate the youth voice within these intergenerational dialogues.

These characters are not heroes; they are complex people who often harbor conflicting points of view. In the same way, our world is not simple, not easy, and true understanding will only derive from our willingness to ask hard questions, **embrace contradictions and empathize with those who differ from us**.
—MARCELA LORCA, DIRECTOR OF DISGRACED

WHAT IS EMPATHY?

Psychology Today defines empathy as the experience of understanding another person's condition from their perspective. You place yourself in their shoes and feel what they are feeling.

INSPIRING MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE

IDENTITY

What is identity? Identity is any element that defines who you are and how you interact with the world, such as your race, gender, sexuality, age, class, ethnicity, faith/religion, documentation status, nationality, etc.

Through *Disgraced*, Milwaukee Rep will discuss the complexities of navigating identity – the factors and decisions that define who you are, the pressures that make you question who you are, and the forces that change who you are. We will do this with a series of discussion-based events every day during the run of the show.

The play presents human beings who are themselves living in a confusing world, wrestling with their identities as Americans, with their ancestral roots and with a culture in which, sadly, surveillance and violence have become all too familiar.

– MARCELA LORCA, DIRECTOR OF DISGRACED

POST SHOW DIALOGUES, INTERCULTURAL DINNERS

Join us for a 30-minute post-show dialogue, panel, or talkback after every performance! In partnership with the Zeidler Center for Public Discussion we will be holding **post-show small group discussions** after 21 performances. On select nights, we will hear from experts on topics from Identity Politics to Identity in Post-9/11 America during our **panel discussions**. On other nights, we will hold **Actor Talkbacks** and **Intercultural Talkbacks** with community members from across Milwaukee. And on Monday nights, 2-hour dinner dialogues called **Intercultural Dinners** will take place in our Rehearsal Halls with 360 community members, patrons, and civic leaders. Check out all the details of our programming on www.TalkIdentity.com/JoinTheConversation

"At its best, what the theatre does is it gathers us together, we, social herding animals, arrive together into a room and we behold something that actually happens before us ... which harkens back to a kind of experience of **ritual** and an experience of **one mind one body**, a kind of communion that happens in the audience between audience and performers that - allows us - reaches into us where we can **experience things more deeply than we can individually.**"

– AYAD AKHTAR, 2014 PBS INTERVIEW

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

We are launching a city-wide conversation on identity and we want to hear YOUR thoughts! How do you identify? Why should we be talking about identity? What does identity mean to you? Tweet us your thoughts using **#TalkIdentity**

To find out more ways to be a part of the conversation, visit www.TalkIdentity.com/ShareYourStory



Muslim man praying at Mt. Arafat during hajj 2013, shughal.com

basics of islam

overview

Islam is the world's second largest religion, with 1.6 billion followers, and the fastest-growing major religion in the world. It was founded in Arabia between 610 and 632 by the Prophet Muhammad. At age 25, Muhammad left the caravan trade to embark on a life of contemplation, as a reaction against the polytheistic practices of the inhabitants of Mecca. After the Angel Gabriel announced to him in a vision that he was to be a prophet, Muhammad devoted his life to religious and societal reform, and the abandonment of polytheism.

Muslims, referring to the followers of Islam, revere him as the messenger of the one and only Allah (God), and the last of the prophets descended from Abraham and Jesus. The foundations of the Islamic faith are the **Qur'an** (or Koran), which is **regarded as the true, eternal Word of God**, and **hadith (tradition)**, detailing the words and actions of Muhammad.

history

Disagreements regarding the succession of the prophet induced a division between two Islamic groups: The **Sunnis and Shi'ites**. **Shi'ite tradition rejects the first three successors to Muhammad** as usurpers and acknowledge the fourth, Ali, as the rightful leader of the faith, while the **Sunni tradition recognizes all four successors as legitimate**. From these, numerous other Islamic sects have been derived, including **Sufism**, which emerged as a form of mysticism in the 8th and 9th centuries.

Sunni Muslims account for 75-90% of the world's Muslim population, Shia Muslims comprise 10-20%, and Ahmadiyya Muslims account for approximately 1%.

practice

The primary duties of the Islamic faith are represented by the Five Pillars: profession of faith, daily prayer (five times each day), almsgiving, daylight fasting during the month of Ramadan, and hajj (pilgrimage) to Mecca at least once in a lifetime (if possible) which includes homage to the ancient shrine of the Ka'aba, the most sacred site in Islam.

Muslims gather for communal worship on **Fridays**, during which prayers and a sermon take place at the mosque, which serves as both a house of worship and a center for the teaching of the Qur'an; **the imam**, or community leader, serves as the teacher and leader of prayer.

The Qur'an and the Hadith outline various dietary laws, which forbid the consumption of pork, carrion, blood, intoxicants including alcohol, and any animal slaughtered in the name of another deity.

The purpose of **hijab (veiling)** in Islam is primarily to inspire modesty in both men and women. In covering the body, one shields the heart from impurities. Men are instructed to avert their eyes from women, and women are encouraged to wear loose outer garments and to cover their heads and bosoms.**

Hijab: The word hijab describes the act of covering up, but is generally used to describe the headscarf worn by Muslim women. It comes in a variety of styles and colors, and covers the head and neck but leaves the face clear.*

Niqab: A veil for the face that leaves the area around the eyes clear, worn with an accompanying headscarf.*

Burka: The most concealing of all Islamic veils. It is a one-piece veil that covers the face and body, often only leaving a mesh screen to see through.*

Abaya: A simple, loose over-garment, essentially a robe-like dress that covers the whole body except the head, feet, and hands. This is often worn with the hijab or niqab.

PBUH: An acronym for Peace Be Upon Him, typically used by Muslims when talking about the Prophet Muhammad and other prophets as a sign of respect.



basics of judaism

Jewish men praying at the western wall of Jerusalem, 2008

overview

Judaism is the oldest of the monotheistic faiths, which affirms the existence of one God, Yahweh, with whom the descendants of Abraham entered into a covenant as God's chosen people. The holy writings of the Jewish faith include **the Torah** (specifically the five books of Moses), generally referred to as the Hebrew Scriptures or the Old Testament by Christians, and **the Talmud**, a compilation of oral tradition which includes the oral law, or Mishnah.

history

According to Scripture, Abraham departed northern Mesopotamia for Canaan at the behest of God, who blessed the faithful among his descendants. Jacob (also known as Israel) was the son of Isaac, son of Abraham; twelve families descended from Jacob were enslaved in Egypt and led out of bondage by Moses. The Hebrews returned to Canaan after 40 years in the desert, claiming the Promised Land granted them by God from the local inhabitants.

zionism

Zionism is the national movement of the Jewish people that supports the re-establishment of a Jewish homeland in the territory defined as the historic Land of Israel (roughly corresponding to Palestine, Canaan or the Holy Land). Anti-Semitism experienced a strong resurgence in the 19th century, culminating in the Holocaust of World War II, which claimed the lives of more than 6 million Jews. The Zionist movement was forged in response, resulting in the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

Since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Zionism continues primarily to advocate on behalf of Israel and to address threats to its continued existence and security.

practice

Modern Judaism includes synagogue worship, which includes readings from the Law (the five books of Moses known as the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy) and the Prophets, and prayer. The commandments of the Torah are central to religious life, and include the practices of circumcision and observation of the Sabbath. There are three primary expressions of Judaism today: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. Generally, Jews do not attempt to convert others to their religion, but do accept newcomers to the faith; additionally, **Jewish identity is not necessarily tied to acceptance of the Torah but rather to a cultural and historical identity, creating a strong secular, atheist, and agnostic presence within Jewish life.**

*Source: Arizona Theatre Company, written by Katherine Monberg, ATC Literary Manager, with assistance from April Jackson, Learning & Education Manager; Bryanna Patrick and Luke Young; Learning & Education Associates. Separate sources: *BBC, [www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/24118241], **Lyceum Theater Company's Play Guide, ***Wikipedia*

a brief history of the india and pakistan border



On August 15, 1947 India and Pakistan gained their independence after 200 years of British rule. Where once they were joined under the Mogul Empire, they became two separate nations with the Indian Independence Bill. The division of the countries took so long because of religious differences between Hindus and Muslims. The Bill was meant to contain all Hindus and India and all Muslims in Pakistan. But, this plan did not go accordingly as nearly one third of the Muslim population remained in India. Not only was there turmoil over religious differences, but there was also turmoil over territories that remained unclaimed. This led to a series of wars and constant disagreement between India and Pakistan.

The provinces of Punjab and Bengal in the northwest and northeast, respectively, did not have overwhelming Muslim or Hindu majorities, so both were divided into east and west provinces, which resulted in the largest mass migration in human history.*

Source: Arizona Theatre Company, written by Katherine Monberg, ATC Literary Manager, with assistance from April Jackson, Learning & Education Manager; Bryanna Patrick and Luke Young; Learning & Education Associates.

*Seattle Repertory Theater Playguide



excerpt from jonathan l. green's *disgraced* and islamic art: the gap between optics and truth

by jonathan l. green, associate literary manager,
goodman theatre, reprinted with permission

In the opening moments of Ayad Akhtar's Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Disgraced*, we see an intimate image: Emily, a young, white artist, is sketching her husband Amir, a well-to-do Pakistani American lawyer. Emily reveals the idea for this new sketch was inspired both by a minor run-in with a racist waiter the night before, as well as Diego Velázquez's 1650 portrait of Juan de Pareja. "You made him see that gap. Between what he was assuming about you, and what you really are," Emily says of the interaction with the waiter. Emily also notes original viewers of Velázquez's portrait of de Pareja, who was his slave and studio assistant, thought they were "looking at a picture of a Moor. An assistant... [But] that portrait has more nuance, complexity, life than his paintings of kings and queens." Both inspirations have to do with brown skin, with Orientalism (a Western stereotyping of the cultures of the Middle East, Asia and North Africa) or its progeny Islamophobia. **Both inspirations deal with the difference between appearance and truth.**

That Emily's figurative drawing of Amir is the first thing we see on stage is telling of Amir's relationship with Islam, the religion taught in his home during his youth. In many cases Islam as a religion is traditionally aniconic, eschewing figurative art, and instead embracing elaborate geometric patterns and calligraphy (though there are exceptions to this, especially from cultures within the Mughal Empire). Creating images of God and the Prophet Muhammad is strictly forbidden in nearly all practices of Islam, but many Sunni hadith (reports of the deeds and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad) are interpreted, especially in more conservative practices, as forbidding man-made images of sentient beings in general. "Angels of mercy do not enter a house where there are pictures," says one hadith. Another translation reads, "The people who will receive the severest punishment on the Day of Resurrection will be those who try to make the like of God's creations." God is here likened to an artist, a creator, and humans striving to imitate God's act of creation commit heresy. To attempt to show the living "truth" of a person or project one's soul in something man-made can be sacrilege. There is a similar aniconic prohibition against the imaging of God in the teachings of Judaism, though for the majority of the history of the Christian church, there is a rich tradition of the imaging of Jesus and other holy figures.

Of course, Emily's statement can also apply to the prejudices, fears and power dynamics of the world of Akhtar's story. Orientalist beliefs target "Eastern" ethnicity, but starting in the 1990s (and especially after the September 11 attacks of 2001), we've seen a cultural and societal shift in some areas from American Orientalism to American Islamophobia: destructive stereotypes of the ethnic "Arab" have transitioned to hateful stereotypes of the religious Muslim, regardless of the actual religious beliefs or ethnicities of their targets. Simple figural traits, like having brown skin, or wearing a turban or veil, can incite hate and violence. In the months following the September 11 attacks, for example, reports of murders and assaults of not only practicing Muslims but also Sikh Indians, Indian Hindus, Coptic Christians and others increased 1500% as anti-Muslim sentiment swept across America—despite the fact that some of these attacked victims did not practice Islam or were not of Arab descent.

In *Disgraced*, Amir made the personal and complicated decision to separate himself from his religious and cultural upbringing many years prior to the beginning of the play. He married a white woman and has a high-paying job at a mostly Jewish law firm. He wears high-end suits and crisp \$600 dress shirts. And yet, despite all efforts to seem wholly Western, Amir still must submit himself to manual searches at the security line in the airport. When he makes an off-hand comment to the media about a local imam in legal trouble, eyebrows raise. In a representational society where skin color can determine one's fate far more easily than skill or character, "optics" have great power.

Misrepresentation begins first with simplified representation—these are the building blocks of stereotyping and, further, racializing—whether in 2-D art or in popular society. In his blistering play Akhtar challenges our perceptions of what it means to misrepresent and to be misrepresented: what are we showing when we depict another person, whether in art, word or deed? What are we showing when we reveal or hide depictions of ourselves? Amir's ancestral culture placed great value on character, on belief, on truth, shunning representative figuration, relying instead on

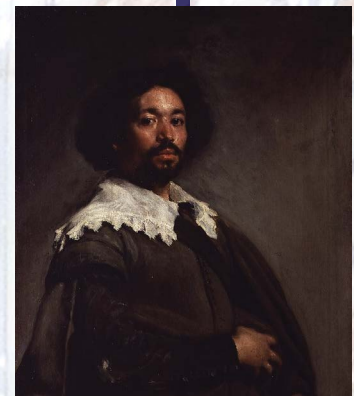
Diego Velázquez (1599-1660), the most famous painter of the Spanish Golden Age, considered one of the greatest artists of his or any other time. His 1623 portrait of Philip IV of Spain rejected the then-typical baroque approach in favor of one with elegance and dignity. An impressed Philip appointed Velázquez as royal painter. Instrumental in Velázquez's development was a meeting with Peter Paul Rubens in 1628-29 and a trip to Italy shortly thereafter where Philip sent the painter to improve his skills.

"With brilliant diversity of brushstrokes and subtle harmonies of color, he achieved effects of form and texture, space, light, and atmosphere that make him the chief forerunner of 19th-century French Impressionism." [Encyclopedia Britannica]
-Guthrie Theater's Play Guide for *Disgraced*

Portrait of Juan de Pareja

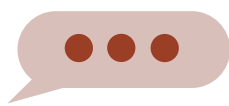
"Juan de Pareja (born about 1610, died 1670)" is part of the Met's permanent collection, purchased in 1971. The Met's label information about the painting reads:

"This extraordinary portrait depicts Velázquez's slave of Moorish descent, who served as an assistant in his workshop. Painted in Rome, it was displayed publicly beneath the portico of the Pantheon in March 1650. Velázquez clearly intended to impress his Italian colleagues with his unique artistry. Indeed, we are told that the picture 'gained such universal applause that in the opinion of all the painters of the different nations everything else seemed like painting but this alone like truth.' Juan de Pareja became a painter in his own right and was freed by Velázquez in 1654."



Diego Velázquez's Portrait of Juan de Pareja.
Image credit to The Met Museum Online Art Collection.

Emily's friend Isaac, taken by her Islam-inspired work, playfully accuses her of Orientalism. "You've even got the brown husband," he jokes. She counters, saying, "We've all gotten way too wrapped up in the optics... We've forgotten to look at things for what they really are."



critical reception

Disgraced, as the most produced play in America last year, has been met with praise and controversy. It won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2013, along with a Joseph Jefferson award, Obie Award, and Tony Award nomination for Best Play since its premiere in 2012.

One prominent critical response came from **Jamil Khoury, Artistic Director of Silk Road Rising**, a theater company that creates live theatre and online videos that tell stories through primarily Asian American and Middle Eastern American lenses.

"Disgraced demands vigilance, scrutiny, interrogation, and rigorous questioning . . . Disgraced also requires savvy producers who can facilitate public conversations and solicit community input long before and well after the curtain rises . . . The difference between Disgraced being the Muslim story engaged by mainstream theatre goes, as opposed to a Muslim story among many, is a difference mainstream theatre should be striving to identify and correct."

Source: "PARSING DISGRACED: An Assault, A Critique, and A Truce" by Silk Road Rising Artistic Director Jamil Khoury [<http://www.silkroaddrising.org/news/parsing-disgraced-an-assault-a-critique-and-a-truce>]
To learn about how The Rep is encouraging discussion among audience members, visit www.TalkIdentity.com/JoinTheConversation

Playwright Ayad Akhtar has responded to criticisms in many interviews since the play's premiere:

Ayad Akhtar recently heard from a college student who thinks his Pulitzer Prize-winning drama, *Disgraced*, is unfair to Muslims. This has happened a lot, as his sudden breakthrough projects have touched the raw nerve connecting Islam and America.

"It's a very difficult moment," Akhtar says. "I understand that people are confused." ...

For any group under attack, of course, the logical posture is to show no weakness.

"I totally get it," the amiable yet tightly focused Akhtar says in a low-key Manhattan restaurant. "I respect it. But I can't control my artistic obsessions and passions. And if I control that stuff, then the work as no vitality. Nobody's going to care. And they're not going to feel connected to it in a personal way if they don't share my background. That's the goal, is to reach a kind of – universality? – something in everyone."

Source: Nelson Pressley, A Pulitzer for his play 'Disgraced' in hand, Ayad Akhtar comes to Washington," The Washington Post, April 22, 2016

"When I wrote this play in 2011, I had no expectations that the degradation of public speech that happens in the play is something that the audience would be dealing with in their daily life. Today, you turn on the television or you walk into the store and people are talking to each other the way that they do in the play. I think the play, in a way, has been prescient about developments in American political life and American cultural life that have nothing to do with Islam, but that are perhaps catalyzed by certain shifts and fissures."

Source: Ayad Akhtar, "Ayad Akhtar on Islam in America and his 'prescient' drama, Disgraced" by J. Kelly Nestruck, The Globe and Mail, March 24, 2016



Janan Najeeb, President of the Milwaukee Muslim Women's Coalition shared this response to the play:

The American Muslim community's excitement and pride that one of their own has finally broken through the glass ceiling and written a play that has had more national productions this past year than any other play, is greatly tempered by their feeling that it could have very well been written by someone with an anti-Muslim agenda. While playwright Ayad Akhtar is certainly not anti-Muslim, he does acknowledge being raised a "cultural Muslim," rather than one immersed in the understanding and practice of the faith. Some wonder if the fascination with this work of fiction is partly due to the validation of fears many have about Muslims while vindicating those that have made a living by propagating such fears? In some reviews, the Muslim community's concerns have been summarily and patronizingly dismissed as simpletons that do not understand art, or a community that does not want their dirty laundry aired in public. Such broad generalizations are not only incorrect, but they lead to a one sided monologue that is meant to silence critics of the play.

CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE

As you watch this play, please note that Muslims are neither the first group, nor will they be the last group in America to be stereotypically portrayed in theater, film, art, media or other mediums. However, when that portrayal goes beyond dangerous stereotypes, aiming for shock value, it can contribute to the type of anti-Muslim hysteria that has gripped our nation, including calls for instituting a national Muslim registry, bans on the building of Mosques and a skyrocketing number of hate crimes against American Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim.

As a small minority, American Muslims seldom have the opportunity to challenge stereotypes and have their voices heard. If *Disgraced* was simply one of a number of plays about American Muslims, which included some with more artistic and insightful depictions, there would be no need for discussion. However, right now in America, this is the only mainstream depiction.

Many thanks to Milwaukee Repertory Theater for their efforts to create dialogue opportunities around this play.

from the set designer, james youmans

originally printed in guthrie theater's playguide for disgraced



In addressing the concept and approaching the design, one of the things that Marcela really wanted to do was not necessarily place this in a highly realistic setting. We know it takes place in the Upper East Side, we know specifically where it takes place, and to be perfectly honest I kind of ignored all that. It was addressed to great detail in the original New York production, and I deliberately chose to pull away from that, but also Marcela wanted to create an environment that was abstract enough that it would allow the environment to breathe and that there could be a larger world outside the world of this room or apartment we are in.

The approach we took, then, was rather than go for a more traditional Upper East Side grand apartment, we chose to push it in a much more contemporary direction. We chose to make it one of the more ostentatious, contemporary apartments that have been built that are basically everywhere and have been taking over the city in the last 10 years. Some are stunningly beautiful and some are very sterile, they run the gamut. What they all have in common is that they really say, "I have arrived." They state wealth, power and prestige, echoing the very expensive shirts and pressed collars on our main character. The apartment design also pulls in some of the geometry and design of Islamic art and its mathematical and geometric traditions. Rather than set this in a contained box, it's more fragments of this room beyond which we see an abstract photographic blurred view of Manhattan – just lights and background, not realistic. There's a strong visual statement of the red floor that undergirds everything in the design and the environment. Everything else is set against that.

The challenge also was to design this for three theaters. Having to fit this into the Guthrie proscenium and the McCarter, which are both prosceniums, was easy, but then to go to the thrust environment of Milwaukee Rep created some challenges. We wanted to address all three as we pursued design so it would function for all three environments as the play moves on from the Guthrie.

Most of the change in this play is through lighting, except for the last scene of this play, when the set is stripped. In the very last scene the moving out from the apartment has begun, so rather than magically make everything disappear, we're choosing to have stage hands come and move most of the furniture out, but much of it is just pushed to the side as if it's about to be moved out. So what we're going to see is this stripped environment, but the detritus, what's left of this broken relationship, is still present, packed up ready to go. Hopefully it will create that sense of both estrangement and the vague echo of the very difficult moment we've had just previous, in the violence that ends the previous scene.



a mechanism for the mission

a conversation with leda hoffmann,
director of community engagement

by amanda garrigan

GARRIGAN: How would you describe your job to someone who doesn't know you or The Rep?

HOFFMANN: My main job is to focus on the parts of our mission statement about creating positive change and promoting meaningful dialogue, these really important values that The Rep has, and work with other departments and within my own department to make those things happen.

G: What was your initial reaction to *Disgraced*? And how do you reflect on that reaction in the context of the Milwaukee Rep's Mission Statement?

H: My initial reaction focused on the way that this play hits people in so many different ways. That's something that really excited me about it, there wasn't a homogeneous way of walking away from the play with a very specific idea. All five characters of this play give us a mirror for ourselves in some way, and the struggles they go through. It's an incredibly provocative play in which all of these characters have their own decisions, and their own opinions that come out. **And yet one of things I think Ayad is asking us to do is to take a step back from that and think about the things that have caused these people to get where they are. What are the societal pressures that have caused all of this?** It's like a pressure cooker, this play. It can't be taken as just these people in isolation, in this particular apartment. But as you think about the things that have happened to all of these characters over the course of their entire lives, and start to look at the things people expect of you based on the way you are seen. As a woman, as an African American, as a Jewish person, as an Arab American. That to me makes a play that is incredibly specific feel very universal.

I keep a Lorraine Hansberry quote above my desk: "... in order to create the universal, you must pay very close attention to the specific." Like her *Raisin in the Sun*, *Disgraced* is another one of those incredible specific plays that allows us to think about big universal themes.

G: Why do you think it's important for the Milwaukee community to see this play?

H: In any community, empathy is critical and **this play asks you to step into someone else's shoes and think about their identity and perspective on the world.** In Milwaukee specifically, there are specific issues that revolve around identity and the perception of people as "other." Through this play and the conversation around it, there is an opportunity to hear from people with a different perspectives and build empathy.

G: Marcela Lorca, director of Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Guthrie, and McCarter Theater's Co-Production of *Disgraced* states in her director's note:

The imaginative power of theater can sometimes converge with real-life events in such a way that we might think we're witnessing a documentary, a slice of life, but we're not. **Theater is not a documentary, and many plays are not bound by strict realism.** A work of art does not have to take political sides, does not need to represent a whole culture, it is not just an exposition of facts. Theater's roots lie in poetic language, choral and musical delivery, in pursuing epic exchanges of ideas in order to invite us to a common experience where we are provoked together and we can feel together. Contemporary plays look to provoke audiences much in the way the Greeks did.

What are your thoughts on this clear divide between theater and documentaries?

H: I think that's a really helpful and smart thing to say about this play. Art is art. Whether designed to entertain or to provoke, or all of those things, one of the great things about it is that it's freed from the boundaries of documentary conventions. I think good theater doesn't preach to people, and because this piece of art is freed from the ideas of what a documentary is, what you're really hearing is a good story. Through that, there's a little more freedom to think about the ways those characters make you feel.

G: What's your goal with Community Engagement programming in general, and specifically surrounding *Disgraced*?

H: For many years, The Rep has been having community dialogues such as Rep in Depth, Panels, and Talkbacks; all those things are not new to us. But creating a Community Engagement Department and focusing staff time on community engagement has meant that we can take it to the next level. We have been able to really think about new models that provoke meaningful dialogue. What exactly does that mean? What are the tools at our disposal to do that? One of the biggest programs that we have as a department is this community conversations series, focused last season on *American Song* and this season on *Disgraced*. This has been so wonderful to have the resource to make sure we have the tools to have this conversation and to make sure this conversation goes further than the theater. This year that means a city wide conversation about identity: TalkIdentity.com, Intercultural Dinners, panels, and Talkbacks are all a part of this big picture conversation around identity.

G: What is your ideal outcome for somebody participating in one of these Community Conversations?

H: Good theater and a good theater company asks questions of its audience, provides space to grapple with the issues surrounding us as a society right now, and allows people opportunities to find their own answers. Positive change is people digging a little deeper to think about what they can do to make the world a better place. To me it's all about those deeply personal connections. It's about the fact when you stay after to talk about a show, you're going to hear a first person perspective from somebody else sitting that audience who you've never met before, and it might be somebody who seems to lead a life that's way different than you... it also might be somebody who lives on your street and you've just never had a chance to talk to before. But within that, I really believe that because you hear those things, that within itself is positive change.

Dr. Katherine Wilson, the Executive Director of the Zeidler Center, is great at reminding us that sometimes talk is action. A deeper understanding of another human's perspective is action. And what we are doing right now, with the help of our Mpact Council is ensuring that the topics The Rep picks for these community conversations, and the questions and ideas that come out of them, relate directly to the conversations the city is hungry to have and tie into the work of other organizations that can take this charge forward. I see The Rep as a step one organization so we have to partner with step two, three, four organizations that take things to other levels to more connections that broaden the conversations. **We can reach a huge number of people with a show at Milwaukee Rep, but we can reach even more people when we work with other like-minded organizations that are having these similar conversations and create action from them.**

G: What is your challenge to audience members who are attending *Disgraced*?

H: Stay and listen. While we hope you feel compelled to share, no one is forced to talk at these dialogues. It's a chance to sit and listen, and to hear another perspective on the story that you just saw. The story in the play is one part, and the second part is what the play brings up in you and your fellow community members. We had so many people last year stay for the dialogues who weren't sure if they wanted to, and told us later that they were so incredibly glad they did. I hope more and more people take a chance and stick around and figure out what this is about. We know it's not for everybody but I've seen lots of people who think it's not for them find they really like it.

Know the Zeidler Center facilitators have been through a rigorous training process on facilitation. If emotions are heated (or not), whatever perspective people enter, I have great faith in the Zeidler Center to ensure that a respectful, interesting conversation happens.

G: Why do you do theater? What is theater's responsibility in the world today?

H: I do theater because I believe in the power of stories to build empathy in the world. I love the way a well told story can lift me up and push me to be better. The moments I've been hit with an exceptional play are life moments that are so important to me. I love telling stories that can be those moments for other people. I'm the kind of a person who wants to a job that in some way makes the world a better place. There are so many ways in which to do that, making the decision to spend my career full time doing theater means that I believe in the power of theater deeply as a tool to bring people together.

G: So what I would take from that response is that one of the main responsibilities of theater is to be honest. Do you agree with that? Do you have anything to add on to that?

H: Exactly. Theater has a responsibility to be honest, to be a reflection of the world around it, to actively listen to the world we live in as it is created and, in turn, to hold a mirror up to nature and ask audiences to listen honestly to the world around them.



glossary

Ahmadinejad: an Iranian politician who was the sixth President of Iran from 2005 to 2013. He has been criticized domestically for his economic policies and disregard for human rights.

Al-Qaeda: an extremist, Islamist wahhabi jihadist group that have been responsible for various civilian and military attacks including the 1998 U.S. embassy bombings, the September 11th attacks, and the 2002 Bali bombings. Al-Qaeda ideology proposes the removal of all foreign influence from Muslim countries and the creation of a worldwide Islamic caliphate, and the replacement of “man-made” laws with strict sharia law.

anti-semitic: to be hostile, prejudicial, or discriminatory against Jews.

apostate: one who has formally renounced or abandoned a religion.

Bartman: a Chicago Cubs fan who disrupted baseball history by reaching for a foul ball, disrupting a potential catch and out by Cubs outfielder Moisés Alou.

Charvet: a French high-end shirt maker and tailor, founded in 1838 and located in Paris.

chorizo: a highly seasoned pork sausage, originally from Spain

contrarian: a person who opposes or rejects popular opinion, especially in stock exchange dealing.

Denial of Death: a 1973 work of philosophy and psychology by Ernest Becker, and the winner of the 1974 Pulitzer Prize for General Non-fiction, which builds upon the philosophies of Kierkegaard, Freud, and Rank.

Fulbright: the Fulbright Program, founded in 1946, consists of highly competitive, merit-based grants for international educational exchange for students, teachers, professionals, scientists, and artists.

fundamentalism: a form of religion that upholds belief in the strict, literal interpretation of scripture, with no concessions to modern developments in thought or customs.

Giselle: a romantic ballet about a peasant girl who dies of a broken heart after discovering her lover is betrothed to another.

Goldman Sachs: a leading global investment banking, securities and management firm.

Hamas: a Palestinian Islamic organization founded in 1988. Hamas was created to liberate Palestine from Israeli occupation and establish an Islamic state in the region that consists of modern day Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. The military wing of Hamas has been designated a terrorist organization.

Hitchens: a British author, literary critic, and journalist. Hitchens was an ardent advocate for the separation of church and state and a self-described antitheist.

Ibn Arabi: an Andalusian Sufi mystic, poet and philosopher who lived in the 12th and 13th centuries. He is regarded by some Sufi practitioners as a saint, though Muslim scholars have been traditionally and vehemently polarized on the topic.

islamo-fascism: a controversial neologism based on clerical fascism, which draws parallels between the ideologies of specific Islamist movements and many European fascist movements of the early 20th century. The term has been heavily criticized by scholars and historians, many of whom consider it to be historically inaccurate and simplistic.

jihad: in Arabic, “striving, applying oneself, struggling, persevering.” Many observers talk of jihad having two meanings

jihadist: a 21st-century neologism found in the Western languages to describe Islamist militant movements.

Kissinger: an American diplomat and political scientist, who served as National Security Advisor and later as concurrent Secretary of State in the Nixon and Ford Administrations. His Realpolitik diplomacy fueled many controversial policies, including support of Pakistan despite their involvement in genocidal activities during the Bangladesh War in 1971.

kufi: a brimless, short, and rounded cap worn by men in many populations in North Africa, East Africa, Western Africa and Asia.

la tur: an Italian cheese.

lipitor: a statin drug, used primarily to lower blood cholesterol and prevent cardiovascular disease.

London Frieze Art Fair: one of the world’s largest contemporary art fairs that takes place each October.

Martin Amis: an English novelist whose work focuses on the apparent excesses of late-capitalist Western society. His particularly radical views on the Islamic world have gone under heavy fire.

Matisse: a French painter (1869-1954) who later in life frequently chose orientalist topics for his paintings.

mazel tov: a Jewish phrase expressing congratulations or wishing someone good luck.

mergers & acquisitions: transactions in which the ownership of companies, other business organizations or their operating units are transferred or combined. From a legal point of view, a merger is a legal consolidation of two entities into one entity, whereas an acquisition occurs when one entity takes ownership of another entity’s stock, equity interests or assets.

Michelle Bachmann & the Renaissance: tea party queen and fringe Republican presidential candidate Michele Bachmann blamed the European Renaissance for dragging humans out of the god-fearing Dark Ages and allowing the populace to think they can play God.

moor: a member of an Islamic people of Berber or Arab descent who ruled Spain and parts of northwestern Africa from the 8th to the 15th centuries; the term is sometimes inaccurately applied to refer to anyone of Muslim, Middle Eastern or African descent.

Moroni: the last Nephite prophet, historian, and military commander. He became the Angel Moroni, who presented the golden plates to Joseph Smith, from which Smith translated the Book of Mormon.

Mujahideen: the term for one engaged in Jihad. In English usage, it mostly referred to guerrilla type military groups.

Mulla Sadra: an Iranian philosopher who led the Iranian cultural renaissance in the 17th century.

Netanyahu: Benjamin "Bibi" Netanyahu (1949-) is the current Prime Minister of Israel, a position to which he has been elected four times, and the only Israeli Prime Minister in history to be elected three times in a row.

orientalism: a term used for the imitation or depiction of Eastern cultures by writers and other artists from the West.

paella: a Spanish rice dish.

paralegal: a person trained in legal matters who performs tasks requiring knowledge of the law and legal procedures.

Patriot Act: a 2001 Act of U.S. Congress in response to the terrorist attacks of September 11th which dramatically increased law enforcement agencies' ability to search personal records. The full title is "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001".

punjabi: an ethnic group of Indo-Aryan peoples originating from the Punjab region, located in present day Pakistan and northern India. traditional Punjab identity is linked to a linguistic, geographical, and cultural identity, rather than to any race, creed, religion, or language.

Rumi: a 13th century Persian poet, jurist, Islamic scholar, theologian, and Sufi mystic. He also passionately believed in music, poetry and dance as a path by which to reach God.

Siva: Siva or Shiva, is one of the main deities of Hinduism.

Taliban: a Sunni Islamic fundamentalist political movement in Afghanistan currently waging war within that country.

taqiyyah: an Islamic term referring to precautionary dissimulation or denial of religious belief and practice in the face of persecution.

The Tate: a family of four art galleries that house the UK's national collection of British art.

Victoria and Albert: the world's largest museum of decorative arts and design in London, housing a permanent collection of over 4.5 million objects.

WASP: an acronym for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant.

Sources:

Arizona Theatre Company, written by Katherine Monberg, ATC Literary Manager, with assistance from April Jackson, Learning & Education Manager; Bryanna Patrick and Luke Young; Learning & Education Associates.

Wikipedia

Disgraced Teacher Packet

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FURTHER RESOURCES:

The ISM recommends the following translations of the Qur'an, both of which include extensive commentary:

- The Message of the Qur'an by Muhammad Asad
- The Meaning of the Qur'an by Abdullah Yusuf Ali

For more in depth information about Islam

- Ansary, Tamim, *Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes*, New York: Public Affairs, 2009
- Curiel, Jonathan, *Al' America: Travels Through America's Arab and Islamic Roots*, New York: The New Press, 2008
- Understanding Islam: An Introduction, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2006
- Tarsin, Asad, *Being Muslim: A Practical Guide*, Sandala, 2015

For more in depth information about Judaism

- Judaism FAQs:
- <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/globalconnections/mideast/themes/religion/>

For more information from our source PlayGuides

- McCarter Pre & Post Show Guides
- Seattle Repertory Theater
- Berkeley Repertory Theater
- Arizona Theater Company

VISITING THE REP

Milwaukee Repertory Theater's Patty and Jay Baker Theater Complex is located in the Milwaukee Center downtown at the corner of Wells and Water Streets. The building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway and Light Company.

The Ticket Office is visible on the left upon entering the Wells Street doors. The Quadracci Powerhouse is located on the second level and can be accessed via the escalator or elevator.



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- ★ Educate the next generation of theater professionals with our Emerging Artist Program which gives newly degreed artists a chance to hone their skills at The Rep as they begin to pursue their theatrical careers.

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