

AFTERMATH



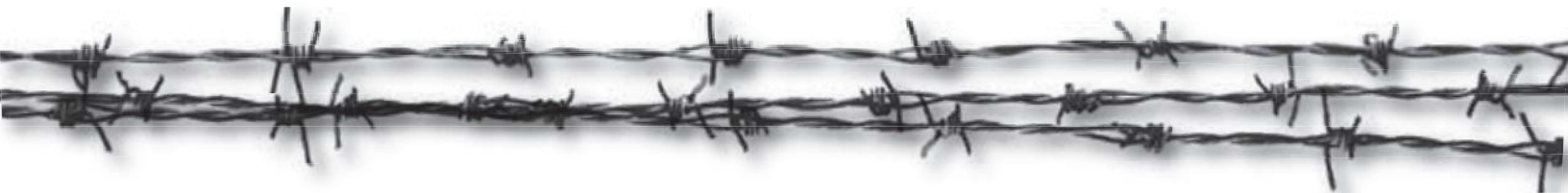


The State Theatre in New Brunswick, NJ welcomes you to New York Theatre Workshop's *Aftermath*. This searing docudrama brings to life deeply personal stories of Iraqi citizens who experienced the trauma of war. It depicts a landscape colored by pain, triumph, reconciliation, exile, and dreams of home. Most importantly, it's about humanity

These *Keynotes* provide information and ideas to give you a context for understanding the drama. We hope that the guide will deepen your understanding and appreciation of the performance and inspire you to continue exploring the politics of exile and the power of theater to make these issues real for audiences thousands of miles and perhaps several decades away from the events depicted in the story.

CONTENTS

Welcome/Acknowledgements	2
The Play	3
The Production	4
Cultures in Conflict	5
Voices of <i>Aftermath</i>	6
Whose Point of View?	7
Recommended Resources	8
Are You Ready?	9



Bank of America



Keynotes are made possible by a generous grant from Bank of America Charitable Foundation.

The State Theatre's education program is funded in part by Bank of America Charitable Foundation, Colgate-Palmolive, The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, E & G Foundation, The Horizon Foundation for New Jersey, Johnson & Johnson Family of Companies, J. Seward Johnson, Sr. 1963 Charitable Trust, Karma Foundation, The Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation, McCrane Foundation, MetLife Foundation, New Jersey State Council on the Arts, The Provident Bank Foundation, PSE&G, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and TD Bank. Their support is gratefully acknowledged.



Funding has been made possible in part by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.



United Airlines is the official airline of the State Theatre.



The Heldrich is the official hotel of the State Theatre.

StateTheatreNJ.org Keynotes

Keynotes are produced by the Education Department of the State Theatre, New Brunswick, NJ. Mark W. Jones, President & CEO
Lian Farrer, *Vice President for Education*
Online at www.StateTheatreNJ.org/Keynotes

Keynotes for Aftermath written and designed by Lian Farrer. Edited by Jennifer Cunha.

© 2011 State Theatre

Production photos for *Aftermath* by Joan Marcus

Find us at www.StateTheatreNJ.org

Contact: education@StateTheatreNJ.org

The State Theatre, a premier nonprofit venue for the performing arts and entertainment.



AFTERMATH

TextJessica Blank and Erik Jensen
 DirectionJessica Blank
 Scenic Design.....Richard Hoover
 Costume DesignGabriel Berry
 Lighting DesignDavid Lander
 Sound Design and Original Music.....David Robbins

March 20, 2003. A date that the ordinary people of Iraq will never forget. A day that changed their lives forever. The day the Americans arrived in their country. In the aftermath of the invasion, millions of Iraqi civilians fled the country, most seeking refuge in neighboring Jordan and Syria, as well as in Egypt.

In 2007, playwright Jessica Blank had a conversation with New York Theatre Workshop Artistic Director, James C. Nicola, concerning the lack of information about the impact on civilians of the war in Iraq. They came up with the idea of having Jessica and her husband, Erik Jensen, create a **documentary theater** piece about the realities of civilian life in Iraq. (The couple had previously written *The Exonerated*, an award-winning play based on interviews they conducted with over 40 wrongfully convicted death row inmates across the United States.)

Documentary theater ("docudrama") is a type of theater or film that presents fictional stories based on real people and events.

In 2008, New York Theatre Workshop sent Jessica and Erik to Amman, Jordan to interview 37 people—a cross-section of lives interrupted—who escaped the chaos and violence that befell Iraqi society following the invasion for the relative safety of Jordan.

Following their two-week visit, Jessica and Erik selected 15 of the interviews and had them translated and transcribed, making sure that the translation retained the detail and nuance of the original language. These became the basis for their docudrama, *Aftermath*, which had its premiere at New York Theatre Workshop in September 2009.



Erik Jensen and Jessica Blank

Pre-Show Discussion

- What do you know about the causes, events, and aftermath of the U.S. invasion of Iraq?
- Have you seen any docudramas? What were they? Did they make you want to find out more about the real people and events that inspired the story?
- How would you define the differences between docudrama (such as *Aftermath*), documentary (Ken Burns' Civil War series), reality television (*Jersey Shore*), and dramatic reenactments (*Rescue 911*)? Do you think most people can recognize the differences?
- How important is it that people understand whether a story is real or fictional? Recently, the authors of the bestselling autobiographies, *Three Cups of Tea* and *A Million Little Pieces*, were accused of falsifying or exaggerating parts of their stories. Should it make any difference to readers who loved and were inspired by these books? Why?

The Production



Cast

FOUAD, a cook, married to Naimah	Omar Koury
SHAHID, a translator	Fajer Al-Kaisi
BASIMA, a wife and mother of the Christian faith	Leila Buck
FADILAH, an artist	Lameece Issaq
RAFIQ, a pharmacist	Barzin Akhavan
ASAD, a theater director, married to Fadilah	Rufio Lerma
YASSAR, a dermatologist	Amir Arison
ABDUL-ALIYY, an imam	Ted Sod
NAIMAH, a cook	Rasha Zamamiri

Aftermath

by Erik Jensen and Jessica Blank

Minimalist set. No rubble, slides of war victims, or the like; just a simple, open space. The stage has two playing areas: one more downstage, where the characters come to tell us their stories; and upstage, a sort of waiting area, perhaps with seating, where characters wait when they are not speaking. All actors are onstage throughout. SHAHID, the translator, inhabits the downstage playing area only.

All the characters are Iraqi. All Arabic in the script should be spoken in Arabic, with no translation assistance from the program, supertitles, or the like. Where SHAHID does not translate the Arabic for us, footnoted translation is provided for the actors' information only (it should not be spoken). In the play, SHAHID translates when necessary; where his translation is not written into the script, any resulting disorientation for the audience is intentional.

The play is seamless: there are no blackouts during the performance, and no intermission. Unless otherwise noted, the characters deliver their monologues to the audience, also interacting sometimes with SHAHID, who moves seamlessly from scene to scene, providing a bridge between the stories. The different characters cannot see each other, but SHAHID can see everyone. When onstage, SHAHID is always lit—his presence is what makes the language understandable—but when he is in a scene with other characters, often he is lit more dimly than the other characters.

Post-Show Discussion

- Did you learn anything from the play about Iraqi refugees? If you already knew something about their situation, did the play make you see things differently? How?
- Which of the characters made the deepest impression on you? Why?
- What dramatic purpose do you think Shahid (the translator) serves in the play? How do the lighting and staging (where he is positioned and where he goes onstage) help the audience understand his role?
- Each character speaks for the first time in Arabic, with Shahid translating into English some (though not all) of what they say. Very quickly, however, the characters switch to addressing the audience in English—a language they don't actually speak or understand. Why would the playwrights use this dramatic device? Did you find it confusing or effective? Why?
- Why do you think the authors didn't want the production to use visual elements such as scenery or projections? Working within these parameters, what were some of the artistic choices made by the director and the set, lighting, costume, and sound designers? What do you think of their solutions? Why?

RATIONALE FOR THE INVASION OF IRAQ

In 2002 and 2003, President George Bush declared that the possibility of Iraq acquiring chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons posed a direct threat to the U.S. He and other senior American officials also accused Iraqi President Saddam Hussein of having ties to the Al Qaeda terrorist organization founded by Osama bin Laden. The U.S. and some of its allies launched an invasion of Iraq with the objective of removing Saddam Hussein from power and finding and destroying any weapons of mass destruction. Within three weeks of the invasion on March 20, 2003, the Iraqi government and military collapsed. The American occupation authority disbanded the Iraqi Army and purged members of the former ruling Ba'ath Party from the government and public life. Saddam Hussein went into hiding, but was eventually captured, then executed.

CONSEQUENCES OF THE INVASION

The toppling of Saddam Hussein created a power vacuum and set off a bloody sectarian civil war, pitting dozens of groups against one another. In cities across Iraq, rival Sunni and Shia militias launched a campaign of sectarian cleansing, taking over neighborhoods and killing or driving out residents of the opposing sect. Terrorist organizations have targeted Iraqi and U.S. security forces, employing suicide attacks, car bombs, kidnappings, hostage-taking, and other strategies, with little regard for civilian casualties. Iraqi security forces themselves have been accused of major human rights violations, including the torture and massacre of Sunni Arabs. The violence has led to a huge exodus of Iraqi civilians to neighboring countries—about 2 million to Syria and Jordan alone.

Ethnicity and Religion in Iraq

Arabs

A grouping of peoples of different origins, religions, and historical identities who can trace their ancestry back to the original inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula. Though the large majority of Arabs today are Muslim, there are also Arab Jews and Arab Christians whose histories predate the founding of Islam.

Sunni and Shia Muslims

Following the death of the Prophet Mohammed in 632, a dispute arose over who would become the next leader of the Muslim world. Islam split into two opposing factions: Shia and Sunni. Over the centuries, the two groups have developed separate beliefs and practices. Globally, approximately 80-90 percent of Muslims today are Sunni, and 10-20 percent Shia, though in Iraq, Shia Muslims far outnumber Sunni.

Kurds

Kurds belong to a distinct ethnic group with its own language, history, and culture. They are predominantly Sunni Muslims. Often the victims of vicious persecution, the Kurds have long struggled for the right to establish an independent homeland.

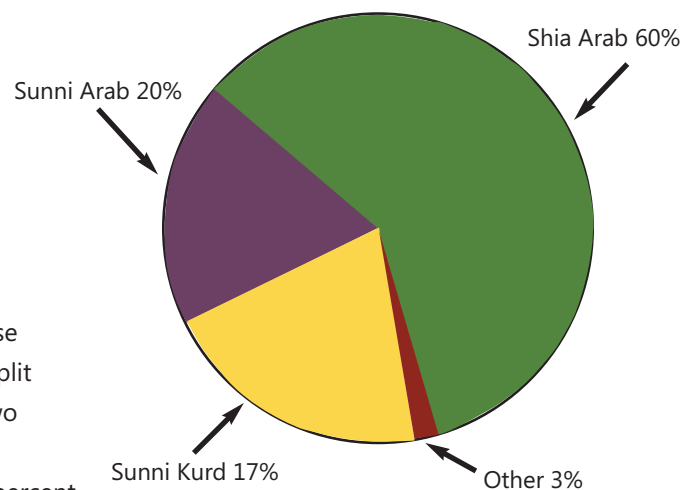
Christians

Iraq is the home of some of the earliest Christian communities in the Middle East. The majority belong to the Eastern Rite churches (as opposed to the church traditions of Western Europe.) Under Saddam Hussein, the Ba'athist regime suppressed anti-Christian violence. It is estimated that after the fall of Saddam, half of Iraq's one million Christians have fled the country.

Jews

One of the world's oldest Jewish communities was in ancient Babylonia (modern-day Iraq). With the start of the Arab-Israeli War, there was a mass exodus of Jews from Iraq, followed by persecution, and forced relocation of those who stayed behind. The Jewish population in Iraq has since fallen from about 150,000 in 1948 to fewer than ten today.

IRAQ'S RELIGIOUS GROUPS





SHAHID

Would you like coffee? Or bread? We have pita bread, fresh from the oven, very good.

When first introduced, most of the characters offer the audience refreshments. Why do you think the authors included this in the script?

RAFIQ

This is the Sunni mosque. Most of the Jews lived on this side, next to the mosque. We were friendly with each other... (finds another picture) This is a church. We had Christians, we had Shia, we had Sunni, we were friends, we didn't care the difference. So, you see. This was Iraq.

More than one character in the play suggests that some Iraqis had a better quality of life under Saddam than they did after the invasion. Do you think they might be justified in wishing Saddam had not been overthrown? Why?

RAFIQ

I just want to understand. Who is the criminal? Who is the suspect? Who is the judge? Who is executing? What is the law? Does this happen in America? Can this happen anywhere in the earth? Even with the barbarians, even animals? Are there any truths? I just want to understand.

How would you respond to Rafiq?

ASAD

I am a theater director. And first of all, I want to say, if an actor is going to read my words in front of an audience? He has to be calm and wise in handling the dialogue, and his motion should be-- balanced, he wouldn't have fear. He's worried, but not afraid. And despite all the difficulties, there is a shining spot in the future... and there must be hope.

What do you think Asad means in this speech? Is he giving acting advice, or do his words have any other meanings?

Even while he is living in exile, Asad speaks of hope for the future. Do you see him ever returning to Iraq? What do you think are the long-term implications for Iraq in losing so many of its educated, moderate, and middle-class artists, intellectuals, and professionals?

SHAHID

You know for many Americans, Abu Ghraib is--

ABDUL-ALIYY

You know, I thank those people for their feelings, there are mistakes for which apologies are not enough. What happened at Abu Ghraib cannot be solved with an apology.

What do you know about the events at Abu Ghraib prison? What do you think drove members of the U.S. armed forces to torture and even murder Iraqi prisoners? Who should be held responsible? What sort of reparations do you believe are owed to the victims?

Whose Point of View?



Aftermath deals with hot-button cultural and political issues that are sure to provoke debate and disagreement, depending on each person's point of view. After you've seen the show, go online and read the full critics' reviews from the list on the right. Then write an essay that addresses these questions:

- Which review most closely reflects your own ideas about the play? Which one do you most disagree with? Cite specific language in each one to support your opinion.
- The reviews come from the U.S. and two countries that were part of the U.S.-led coalition: Great Britain and Australia. Do you see any evidence that the critics' nationalities have influenced their ideas about the play? Give specific examples.
- How would you define the role of a theater critic? Should they focus on the theatrical elements of the show (scenery, lights, acting, etc.) or on interpreting the meaning of the play for the reader? Both? Explain.

"In putting a human face on the thousands of displaced civilians who lost their homes, their families and their history in a catastrophe not of their making, this powerful piece of agitprop theater challenges us all."

—Marilyn Stasio, *Variety* (USA) - September 15, 2009

www.variety.com/review/VE1117941091?refCatId=33

"The exiles whose tales of displacement are related here may be embodied by actors, but you often feel that it's the people they are portraying who are demanding the courtesy of your attention. How can you turn away? This aura of fraught intimacy has been achieved with subtle ingenuity by Mr. Jensen and Ms. Blank..."

—Ben Brantley, *New York Times* (USA) - September 16, 2009

<http://theater.nytimes.com/2009/09/16/theater/reviews/16after.html?pagewanted=all>

"Mostly, Blank and Jensen paint a one-sided pro-Iraqi, anti-American portrait of their chosen topic that, while possibly appeasing those among us eager to wash our hands of responsibility for the Iraq War, doesn't give us all that much to chew on intellectually."

—Richard Patterson, *MusicOMH* (UK) - September 2009

www.musicomh.com/theatre/nyc_aftermath_0909.htm

"...the show's final importance rests on two things: one, it comes from a US source, the New York Theatre Workshop; two ... it reminds us of the tragic consequences of the Iraq invasion."

—Michael Billington, *The Guardian* (UK) - July 8, 2010

www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2010/jul/09/aftermath-michael-billington

"But *Aftermath* is a beautifully crafted show that never slips into emotional sloppiness or propagandist advocacy."

—Victoria Laurie, 720 ABC Perth (Australia) - March 1, 2011

<http://www.abc.net.au/local/reviews/2011/03/01/3152293.htm>

"This recent New York Theatre Workshop production is a truly remarkable example of documentary theatre. So good, in fact, it would not look out of place on a Nobel Peace Prize shortlist."

—Chris Boyd, *The Australian* - October 13, 2011

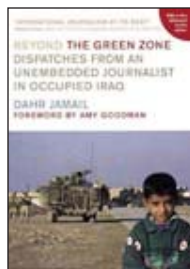
www.theaustralian.com.au/news/arts/finally-we-hear-from-some-ordinary-iraqis/story-e6frg8n6-1226165264384

Recommended Resources



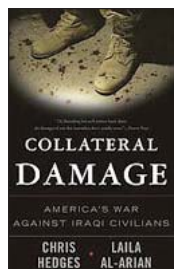
Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches from an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied Iraq, by Dahr Jamail. Nation Books, 2008

An up-close look at daily life in Iraq since the 2003 invasion. One of the few unaffiliated journalists in Iraq, Jamail went to see the conditions for himself, and the compelling, heartbreaking stories he sent back over his eight-month stay were carried in publications world-wide: from family houses destroyed with their inhabitants to mosques full of people held under siege to the ill-equipped medical facilities and security forces meant to deal with them.



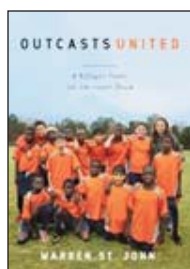
Collateral Damage, by Chris Hedges and Laila Al-Arian. Nation Books, 2009

The book focuses on the Iraq War's impact on civilians and the damage inflicted on them by U.S. forces. Most of the information in the books comes from American soldiers.



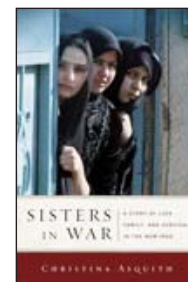
Outcasts United: A Refugee Team, An American Town, by Warren St. John. Spiegel and Grau, 2009

The story of the Fugees, a soccer program for boy refugees who have been resettled in the town of Clarkston, Georgia. Clarkston was designated a refugee settlement center in the 1990s, becoming the first American home for scores of families in flight from the world's war zones—from Liberia and Sudan to Iraq and Afghanistan. This book relates the challenge faced by the Fugees in learning the ways of a strange land and living with the memories of tragedy.



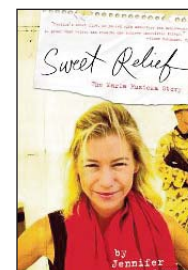
Sisters in War: A Story of Love, Family and Survival in the New Iraq, by Christina Asquith. Random House, 2009

Four Iraqi women dare to stand up for their rights in the most desperate circumstances. Asquith, a journalist who spent many of the early years of the war in Iraq, reveals the plight of women living and serving in Iraq and offers a vision of how women's rights and Islam might be reconciled.



Sweet Relief: The Marla Ruzicka Story, by Jennifer Abrahamson. Simon Spotlight Entertainment, 2006

The story of Marla Ruzicka, the founder of Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict (CIVIC), who was killed in a car bombing in Iraq. Marla lived in Iraq for the first years of the war, recording accounts from Iraqi civilians and fighting for the rights of innocent victims of war. Her organization, CIVIC, was an integral component of the creation of *Aftermath*.



The Council on Foreign Relations interactive timeline of events in the Iraq War, from the 2003 invasion to the present day

www.cfr.org/iraq/timeline-iraq-war/p18876

New York Times article and slide show about the plight of formerly well-to-do Iraqi refugees in Jordan.

www.nytimes.com/2007/08/10/world/middleeast/10re-fugees.html

What's Your Part?



Live theater is a collaboration between the performers and the audience. The artists have spent weeks, months—even years—creating a show to inspire and engage you. Your role in this artistic collaboration is very important to the success of the performance. Make sure you understand your part and follow these simple rules.

1 When the performance begins, focus your full attention on the stage.

2 Turn off all electronic devices. Keep them off for the entire show.

3 No texting or checking messages.

4 No photography or recording of any kind.

