

Rodgers and Hammerstein:
Spotlighting Social Conflict Through Musical Theater

Emily Newby

Junior Division

Individual Documentary

Process paper words: 494

This year's National History Day theme is "Conflict and Compromise in History". I felt that the social conflicts that Rodgers and Hammerstein addressed in their musicals matched this theme. The Chanticleer Theater in Council Bluffs, Iowa, held a student workshop this past summer featuring the Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical Cinderella. The music director did a lesson on the history of Rodgers and Hammerstein, and it was very interesting. When I saw a topic about them on the History Day research list, I knew that should be my topic.

I began my research journey within my community at the libraries of Kirn Middle School and Council Bluffs. Next, I went on two research trips to the Des Moines State Historical Library and the Iowa State Parks Library in Ames. I found books and journal articles that analyzed some of the conflicts in Rodgers and Hammerstein's musicals. Additionally, I looked for newspaper and photo websites to balance out my research. I interviewed three theater people for my project: Iowa State Theater Professor Brad Dell, Former Omaha Community Playhouse Assistant Director Susan Collins, and Chanticleer Theater Music Director Jerry Gray. I also attended the Broadway production of *The King and I* at the Omaha Orpheum Theater and briefly talked Laura Kelly who played the lead role of Anna. Recently, I attended the Iowa State University production of *Oklahoma!*. It was directed by Brad Dell, one of the theater people that I interviewed for my project. Additionally, I watched eight Rodgers and Hammerstein film adaptations. I was also able to find many Rodgers and Hammerstein photos at the New York Digital Public Library.

Through my research, I learned that Rodgers and Hammerstein had a huge impact on what we know as modern musical theater. They wanted musicals to be more than just entertainment. They wanted to leave audiences thinking about social issues

and change. I didn't realize how many conflicts Rodgers and Hammerstein were addressing in their musicals.

I have never created a documentary before. With the music and photos that I found, I thought a documentary would be the best category for this project. I chose to use MovieMaker because I think it is easier to use than iMovie. My home computer also has the MovieMaker software installed. I also had to learn how to write interview questions, how to clip videos using WeVideo, how to write a script, how to record a script, and how to use Easybib for documentation.

Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein were no strangers to conflict while they composed music and lyrics for the American stage from 1943-1959. Their goal as composer and lyricist was to spotlight issues of social injustice through musical theater. They refused to compromise their musical statements, thereby raising America's consciousness on topics ranging from racism to domestic violence. My project relates directly to "Conflict and Compromise" because Rodgers and Hammerstein presented many social conflicts in their musicals to audiences, without compromising the message that change was needed.