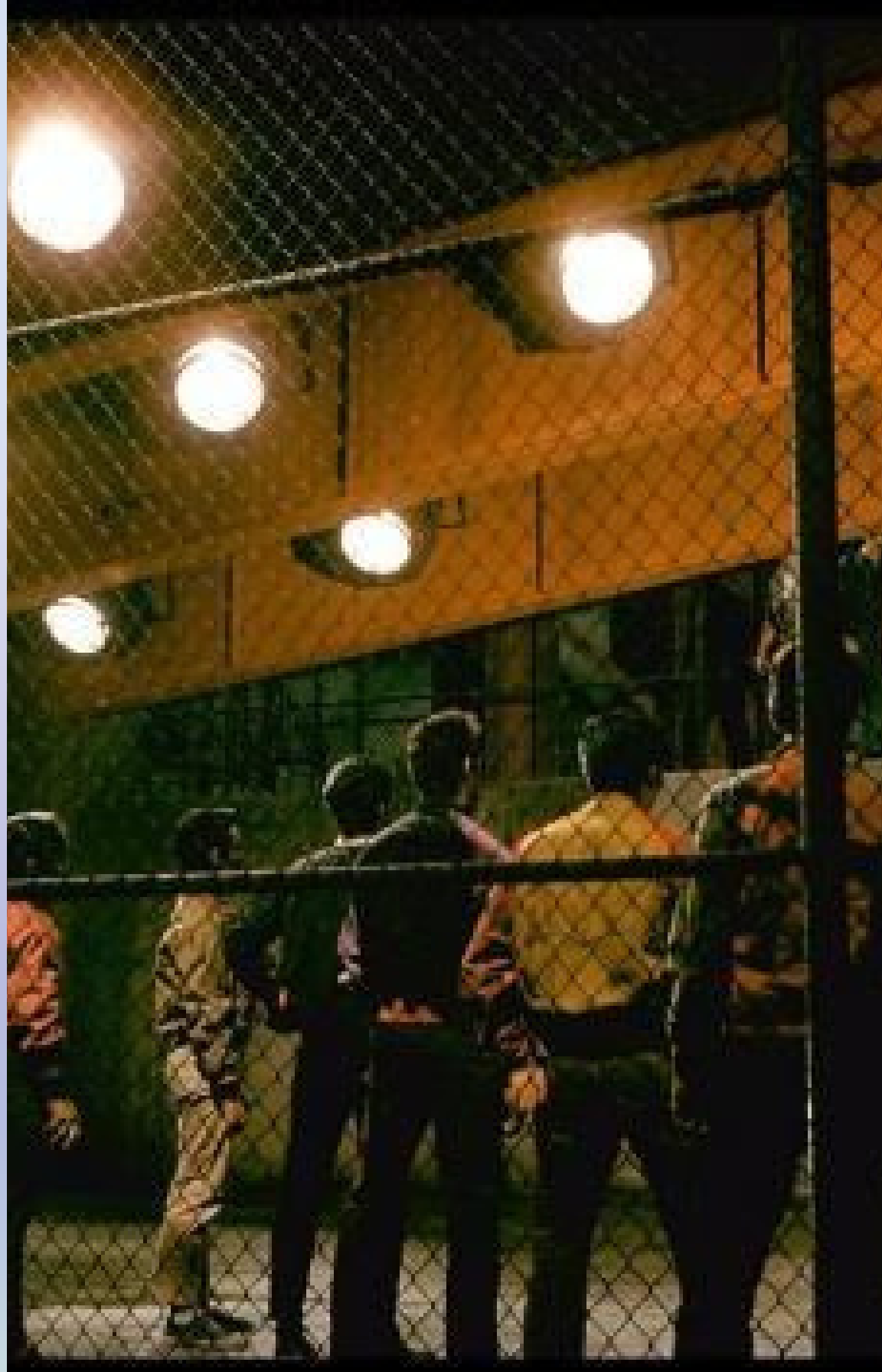




Reimagining West Side Story

Gabby Veciana, AMS 317





This project incorporates set and costume design inspiration with original graphics as well as several staging and casting ideas to create a version of *West Side Story* that can be used to tackle and discuss contemporary issues of racial profiling in the criminal justice system.

The following slides are intended for directorial use of the original libretto and music written by Arthur Laurents, Stephen Sondheim, and Leonard Bernstein.

This project represents my own work in accordance with University regulations. /s/ Gabriela Veciana



Objectives

01. To shift the narrative

From denouncing gang warfare/racial tensions to denouncing the role of the criminal justice system in perpetuating those tensions. To assign the blame on the system, not the children who inhabit it.

02. To provide a framework

Of examples, suggestions, and opportunities for further discussion/research for a director or dramaturg putting up a revival.

03. To highlight the relevance of this timeless story

That can and should continue to be produced and revived. The nature of a story that everyone knows allows it to be bent and twisted in innovative ways.









Maintaining the presence of religion and tradition even in a modern context

I took this in Old San Juan during the protests of 2019- The contrast in attire is interesting but will not be used

Keeping Maria's dresses white and flowy while Anita's resemble salsa gowns with long slits

Costumes

50s

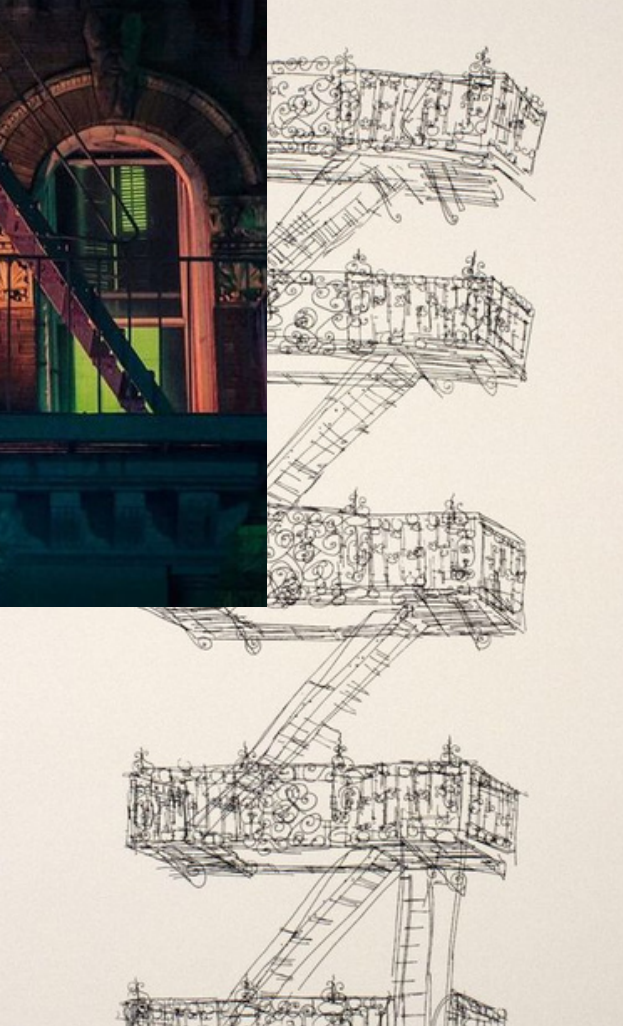
The costumes will be the primary design element functioning to accentuate the timelessness of the story. With the exception of the police, all of the characters will have costumes that transition over time, beginning in the 50s and by the song "Gee, Officer Krupke," reaching modern-day clothes. The intention here is to emphasize that the love story and the barriers they face can occur in any period. The Sharks' costumes in the late 50s should reflect closer ties to Latin American culture, and as their costumes modernize, so do they Americanize.

The characters of Officer Krupke and Lieutenant Schrank will remain in their 50s police uniforms throughout the entirety of the show. This will show that as the rest of the world has progressed, the police, as an institution, has not. We want the police to seem dated, broken, and unhelpful.

Modern

It is important that the costumes are fully modernized by "Gee, Officer Krupke" so that the song that directly addresses the police can be a complete reflection of our current world. The modernization of women's fashion in particular also shows an increase in comfort with sexuality, which is ripped away during Anita's harassment in Act II Scene 4. This could be shown with clothes that are more form-fitting and have more provocative colors. For Riff and Tony, we would see a transition away from classic button-ups and slacks towards jeans and more rugged street-wear.





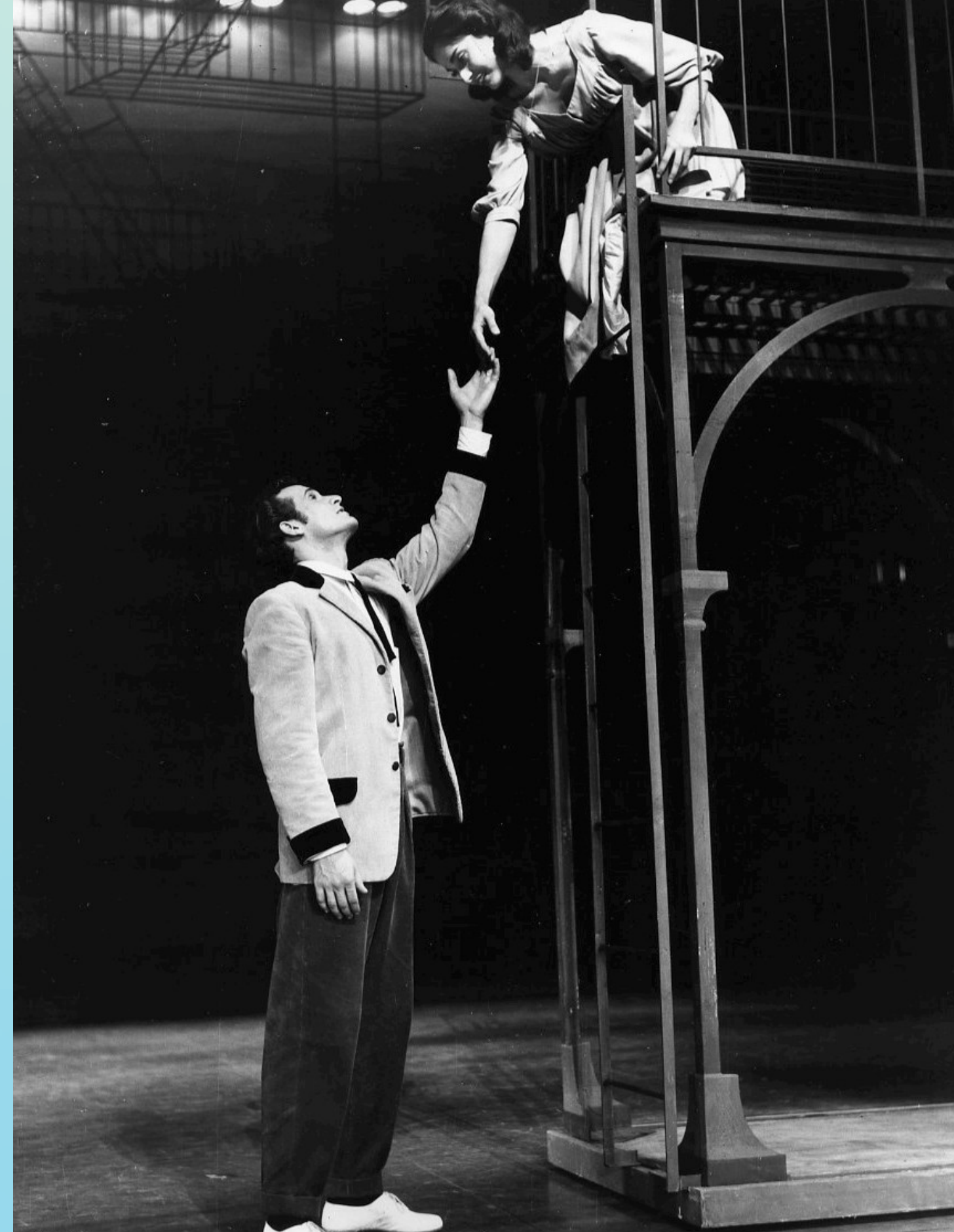
Set

As the costumes will make a strong statement, we don't want the set to be too distracting. For this reason, I have chosen to make the set relatively minimal as a blank stage with two levels, one being the street and one the balcony. The balcony will resemble a New York City fire escape to keep the famous scenes from the film and past stage adaptations, including the song "Tonight." This will also be the setting of Maria's bedroom.

The upper level will also be used by Krupke and Schrank in several scenes in which they do not traditionally appear. They will watch from the balcony a la *Hamilton* to increase their presence and highlight the power of their gaze. Although they see the violence going on, they don't do anything to stop it.

For scenes in the bridal shop, props like mannequins, clothing racks, and loose fabric and garments can be rolled on by cast members in a choreographed manner. Doc's shop can be a simple counter, and register also rolled onto the lower level.

This production will take place in the round to add to the feeling of immersion as if this story could be happening right now in real-time. In fact, it is happening, and so many of us just watch complacently, just like the audience watching the show. The round also frees up the actors' movement and will allow the original choreography to be seen from new angles.



Staging

Annotated Scenes involving the Police

Act I Scene 1

The prologue and first entrance of the police



Act I Scene 4

Dance at the Gym

Act II Scene 2

"Gee, Officer Krupke"

Act I Scene I: Opening

THE POLICE: Schrank and Krupke will watch the entire opening unfold from the balcony, silently observing

The opening is musical: half-danced, half-mimed, with occasional phrases of dialogue. It is primarily a condensation of the growing rivalry between two teen-age games, the Jets and the Sharks, each of which has its own prideful uniform. The boys - sideburned, long-haired- are vital, restless, sardonic; the Sharks are Puerto Ricans, the Jets an anthology of what is called "American."

The action begins with the Jets in possession of the are: owning, enjoying, loving their "home." Their leader is Riff: glowing, driving, intelligent, slightly wacky. His lieutenant is Deisel: big, slow, steady, nice. The youngest member of the gang is Baby John: awed at everything including that he is a Jet, trying to act the big man. His buddy is A-rab: an explosive little ferret who enjoys everything and understands the seriousness of nothing. The most aggressive is Action: a catlike ball of fury. We will get to know these boys better later, as well as Snowboy: a bespectacled self-styled expert.

Fill the entire space with dance as if they own it

Knowing their own jobs are on the line - not out of genuine care for the kids

Fight escalates too much - Police burst in, climb down the stairs

The first interruption of the Jets' sunny mood is the sharply punctuated entrance of the leader of the Sharks, Bernardo: handsome proud, fluid, a chip on his sardonic shoulder. The Jets, by far in the majority, flick him off. He returns with other Sharks: they, too, are flicked off. But the numerical supremacy, the strength of the Jets, is gradually being threatened. The beginnings of warfare are mild at first: a boy being tripped up, or being sandbagged with a flour sack or even being spit on -all with overly elaborate apologies.

Enter SR

Finally, A-rab comes across the suddenly deserted area, pretending to be an airplane. There is no sound as he zooms along in fancied flight. Then over the wall drops Bernardo. Another Shark, another and another appear, blocking A-rab's panicky efforts at escape. They close in, grab him, pummel him, as a Shark on top of the wall is stationed as lookout. Finally, Bernardo bends over A-rab and makes a gesture (piercing his ear); the lookout whistles; Jets tear on, Sharks tear on, and a free-for-all breaks out. Riff goes at once to A-rab, like a protective father. The fight is stopped by a police whistle, louder and louder, and the arrival of a big goonlike cop, Krupke, and a plainclothesman, Schrank. Schrank is strong, always in command; he has a charming, pleasant manner, which he often employs to cover his venom and his fear.

Not in uniform

Scolding in a parental way
Jets are hoodlums

Brains + Brawns duo

Facetious

First line in the show

KRUPKE
Knock it off! Settle down.

SCHRANK
All right: Kill each other! ...But not on my beat.

RIFF [such innocence]
Why if it isn't Lieutenant Schrank.

SEVERAL JETS [dancing class manners]
To of the day, Lieutenant Schrank.

The Jets mock the police, can get away with it

Supports the idea that it's about his job, not their safety

BERNARDO [one with Riff]
And Officer Krupke!

SEVERAL SHARKS
Top of the day, Officer Krupke.

SCHRANK
Boy, what you Puerto Ricans have done to this neighborhood. Which one of 'em clobbered ya, A-rab?

To blame
To accuse

[A-rab looks to Riff, who takes over with great helpful seriousness.]

White Savior

RIFF
As a matter of factuality, sir, we suspicion the job was done by a cop.

SNOWBOY
Two cops.

Jets can afford to joke fun/ make fun of the police

A-RAB
Oh, at least!

KRUPKE
Impossible!

SCHRANK
Didn't nobody tell ya there's a difference between bein' a stool pigeon and cooperatin' with the law?

RIFF
You told us the difference, sir. And we all chipped in for a prize for the first guy who can figure it out.

ACTION [indicating Schrank]
Maybe buddy boy should get the prize.

SCHRANK
Don't buddy me, Action! I got a hot surprise for you: you hoodlums don't own the streets. There's been too much raiding between you and the PRs. All right, Bernardo, get your trash outa here. [Mock Charm.] Please.

To demean

Let's go, Sharks.

BERNARDO

Sharks are TRASH

[They exit.]

SR SHARKS EXIT - Downtown
SL JETS EXIT - Uptown

SCHRANK [to Jets]
If I don't put down the roughhouse, I get put down -on a traffic corner. Your friends don't like traffic corners. So you buddy boys are gonna play ball with me. I gotta put up with them and so do you. You're gonna make nice with them PRs from now on. Because otherwise I'm gonna beat the crap outa every one of ya and then run ya in. Say good-bye to the nice boys, Krupke.

Common Enemy

To reason
To leverage

Empty threat

KRUPKE

Good-bye, boys.

Schrank out.]

[He follows

SNOWBOY [imitating Krupke]
Good-bye, boys.

SR - going after the Sharks

Act I Scene 4: Dance at the Gym

MARIA
'Nardo, it is most important that I have a wonderful time at the dancing tonight.

BENARDO [as Anita hooks up Maria]
Why?

MARIA
Because tonight is the real beginning of my life as a young lady of America!

[She begins to whirl in the dress as the shop slides off and a flood of gaily colored streamers pours down. As Maria begins to turn and turn, going off-stage. Sharks girls, dressed for the dance whirl on, followed by Jet girls. By boys from both gangs. The streamers fly up again for the next scene.]

SCENE FOUR.

10:00 P.M. The gym.

Actually, a converted gymnasium of a settlement house, at the moment being used as a dancehall, disguised for the occasion with streamers and bunting.

Both gangs are jitterbugging wildly with their bodies, but their faces, although they are enjoying themselves, remain cool, almost detached. The line between the two gangs is sharply defined by the colors they wear: the Jets, girls as well as boys, reflecting the colors of the Jets jackets; the same is true of the Sharks. The dancing is a physical and emotional release for these kids.

Maria enters with Chino, Bernardo and Anita. As she looks around, delighted, thrilled by this, her first dance, the Jets catch sight of Bernardo, who is being greeted by Pepe, his lieutenant, and other Sharks. As the music peters away, the Jets withdraw to one side of the hall, around Riff. The Sharks, seeing this, draw to their side, around Bernardo, who starts with his lieutenants to meet him. The moment is brief but it would be disastrous if a smiling, overly cheerful young man of about thirty did not hurry forward. He is called Glad Hand, and he is a "square."

SCHRANK

~~GLAD HAND~~ [beaming]

All right, boys and girls! Attention, please! [Hum of talk.] Attention! [Krupke appears behind ~~Glad Hand~~: the talk stops.] Thank you. It sure is fine turnout tonight. [Ad libs from the kids.] We want to make friends here, so we're going to have a few get-together dances. [Ad libs: "Oh, ginger peachy," ect.] You form two circles: boys on the outside and girls on the inside.

SNOWBOY
Where are you?

~~GLAD HAND~~ [tries to laugh at this]

All right. Now when the music stops, each boy dances with whichever girl is opposite. O.K.? O.K. Two circles, kids. [The kids clap their hands back at him and ad lib: "Two circles,

kids," ect., but do not move.] Well, it won't hurt you to try.

SNOWBOY [limping forward]

Oh, it hurts; it hurts; it-

[Krupke steps forward. Snowboy straightens up and meekly returns to his place. Riff steps forward and beckons to his girl, Velma. She is terribly young, sexy, lost in a world of jive. She slithers forward to take her place with Riff. The challenge is met by Bernardo, who steps forward, leading Anita as though he were presenting the most magnificent lady in all the world. The other kids follow, forming the two circles ~~Glad Hand~~ requested.]

SCHRANK

~~GLAD HAND~~

That's it, kids. Keep the ball rolling. Round she goes and where she stops, nobody knows. All right: here we go!

[Promenade music starts and the circles start revolving. ~~Glad Hand~~, whistles to this mouth, is in the center with Krupke. He blows the whistle and the music stops, leaving the Jet boys opposite Sharks girls, and vice versa. There is a moment of tenseness, then Bernardo reaches across the Jet girl opposite for Anita's hand, and she comes to him. Riff reaches for Velma; and the kids of both gangs follow suit. The "get-together" has failed, and each gang is on its own side of the hall as a mambo starts. This turns into a challenge dance between Bernardo and Anita-cheered on by the Sharks-and Riff and Velma-cheered on by the Jets. During it, Tony enters and is momentarily embraced by Riff, who is delighted that his best friend did turn up. The dance builds wilder and wilder, until, at the peak, everybody is dancing and shouting. "Go, Mambo!" It is at this moment that Tony and Maria-at opposite sides of the hall-see each other. They have been cheering on their respective friends, clapping in rhythm.

Now, as they s

TONY
You're not thinking I'm someone else?

MARIA
I know you are not.

TONY
Or that we have met before?

MARIA
I know we have not.

TONY
I felt, I knew something-never-before was going to happen, had to happen. But this is-

MARIA [interrupting]
My hands are cold. [He takes them in his.] Yours, too. [He moves her hand to his face.] So warm. [She moves his hands to her face.]

TONY
Yours, too.

POLICE watch from balcony
Gym on lower level

Kind of like a YMCA educational, recreational community space

After Schrank has done the bare minimum, he exits offstage, leaving Krupke to babysit

Since police are watching they must keep a facade of camaradery up their dancing contracts with urges to fight

prompts Schrank to go downstairs

Replace Glad Hand with Schrank

Intent: To show how the presence of policing seeps into the kids' private lives

Ex. Security guards in schools

As if this has been his assignment from the precinct. Domy the bare minimum, apathetic attitude

veiled threat

Act II Scene 2: Gee, Officer Krupke

ACTION
Get the lead out, fat boy!

DIESEL
Easy. He'll come back and drag us down the station house.

ACTION
I already been.

SNOWBOY
We both already been.

Been arrested but gotten away with it

No punishment for the Jets, feeling untouchable

A-RAB
What happened?
SNOWBOY
A bit fat nuthin'!

matter-of-factly

The Jets begin to climb the stairs to the upper level as they joke together

A-RAB
How come?

SNOWBOY
Cops believe everythin' they read in the papers.

ACTION
To them we ain't human. We're cruddy juvenile delinquents. So that's what we give 'em.

Up until now, the police have inhabited this space but the Jets feel above the law

Power move

SNOWBOY [imitating Krupke]
Hey, you!

ACTION
Me, Officer Krupke?

SNOWBOY
Yeah, you! Gimme one good reason for not draggin' ya down the station house, ya punk.

ACTION
Dear kindly Sergeant Krupke,
You gotta understand,
It's just our bringin' up-ke
That gets us out of hand.
Our mothers all are junkies,
Our fathers all are drunks.

Begin the song mocking Krupke for being "goon-like"

Jets have the power to reason with Krupke, sharks do not

ALL
Golly Moses, natcherly we're punks!

Gee, Officer Krupke, we're very upset;
We never had the love that every child oughta get.

We ain't no delinquents,
We're misunderstood.
Deep down inside us there is good!

ACTION
There is good!

Jets form a circle while Krupke stays in the center. They dance around him.

ALL
There is good, there is good,
There is untapped good.
Like inside, the worst of us is good.

SNOWBOY [imitating Krupke]
That's a touchin' good story.

ACTION
Lemme tell it to the world!

SNOWBOY [imitating Krupke]
Just tell it to the judge.

ACTION [to Diesel]
Dear kindly Judge, your Honor,
My parents treat me rough.
With all their marijuana,
They won't give me a puff.
They didn't wanna have me,
But somehow I was had.
Leapin' lizards, that's why I'm so bad!

DIESEL [imitating a judge]
Right!
Officer Krupke, you're really a square;
This boy don't need a judge, he needs an analyst's care!

The Sharks wouldn't be given this chance, the tone shifts here to teasing the sharks

It's just his neurosis that oughta be curbed.
He's psychologic'ly disturbed!

Comments can be directed SR, towards the Sharks' turf

ACTION
I'm disturbed!

ALL
We're disturbed, we're disturbed,
We're the most disturbed,
Like we're psychologic'ly disturbed.

DIESEL [speaks, still acting part of the judge]
Hear ye, Hear ye! In the opinion of this court, this child is depraved on account he ain't had a normal home.

ACTION
Hey, I'm depraved on account I'm deprived!

DIESEL [as Judge]
So take him to a headshrinker.

ACTION
My father is a bastard,
My ma's an S.O.B.
My grandpa's always plastered,
My grandma pushes tea.

Act II Scene 2: Gee, Officer Krupke

My sister wears a mustache,
My brother wears a dress.
Goodness gracious, that's why I'm a mess!

A-RAB [as psychiatrist]
Yes!

Officer Krupke, you're really a slob.
This boy don't need a doctor, just a good honest job.
Society's played him a terrible trick,
And sociologically he's sick!

ACTION
I am sick!

ALL
We are sick, we are sick,
We are sick sick sick,
Like we're sociologically sick!

A-RAB [speaks as psychiatrist]
In my opinion, this child don't need
to have his head shrunk at all. Juvenile
delinquency is purely a social disease!

ACTION
Hey, I got a social disease!

A-RAB [as psychiatrist]
So take him to a social worker!

ACTION [to Baby John]
Dear kindly social worker,
They say go earn a buck,
Like be a soda jerker,
Which means like be a schmuck.
It's not I'm anti-social,
I'm only anti-work.
Glory Osky, that's why I'm a jerk!

BABY JOHN [as a female social workers]
Eek!
Officer Krupke, you've done it again.
This boy don't need a job, he needs a year in the pen.
It ain't just a question of misunderstood;
Deep down inside him, he's no good!

ACTION
I'm no good!

ALL
We're no good, we're no good,
We're no earthly good,
Like the best of us is no damn good!

DIESEL [as judge]
The trouble is he's crazy,

Call back to "America"
when the boys complain
about not being
able to get work
("free to wait tables and
shine shoes")

The Sharks begin to
enter from SR -
followed by Krupke who
has been tailing them
Perhaps Krupke has backup?
So it is not a fair fight

While Sharks are "beaten"
the jets sing down from
above, teasing them
for being untouchable

A-RAB [as psychiatrist]
The trouble is he drinks.

BABY JOHN [as social worker]
The trouble is he's lazy.

DIESEL [as judge]
The trouble is he stinks.

A-RAB [as psychiatrist]
The trouble is he's grown.

BABY JOHN [as social worker]
The trouble is he's grown.

ALL
Krupke, we got troubles of our own!
Gee, Officer Krupke,
We're down on our knees,
'Cause no one wants a fella with a social disease
Gee, Officer Krupke,
What are we to do?
Gee, Officer Krupke,
Krup you!

[At the end of the song, Anybodys appears over the fence]

ANYBODYS
Buddy boys!

ACTION
Ah! Go wear a skirt.

ANYBODYS
I got scabby knees. Listen-

ACTION [to the gang]
Come on, we gotta make sure those PRs know we're on top.

DIESEL
Geez, Action, ain't we had enough?

ANYBODYS [going after them]
Wotta buncha Old Man Rivers: they don't know nothin' and they
don't say nuthin'.

ANYBODYS
Diesel, the question ain't whether we had enough-

ACTION
What do you know?

ANYBODYS
I know I gotta get a skirt. [She starts off, but Diesel stops
her.]

DIESEL
Come on, Anybodys, tell me.

During the final verse,
Krupke can be seen instigating
brutality with the Sharks, dance
fighting similar to the opening
sequence except very
one-sided.

Said by Krupke to the Sharks as
they run away
Krupke + police follow SR



A note on staging

The upper level serves a dual purpose: to be the fire escape and to separate the police from the scenes below. In these scenes, which are just examples, the police can be seen watching over the events below and only interfering when their jobs are in jeopardy. Another instance in which this might occur is the rumble when they enter the scene only after the deathly turn at the end.

With "Gee, Officer Krupke" in particular, as the police and Sharks "fight" on the lower level, the goal is to show that the police are more likely to engage with a particular group physically. We don't want any graphic or brutal scenes that may trigger the audience, but we want it to be more than just a verbal argument - the dance fighting is only one idea to convey this message.



Casting

Some options - but keeping in mind that casting decisions can change depending on who walks into the audition room

Jets

It is imperative that the Jets are cast as White actors. For there to be a confidence in their resistance and teasing of the police, we must acknowledge that this is a product of White privilege and supremacy.

Their age-range should be mid-teens to early twenties.

Sharks

The Sharks should be cast as Latinx actors, allowing them to self-identify. When dealing with the conversation of policing today, it is impossible to ignore the role that Blackness plays.

Casting should aim to cast a variety of colors, shapes, and sizes, displaying the Latinx community's spectrum. Bernardo specifically should be cast as an Afro-Latinx actor having a darker complexion than the rest to make a statement about colorism. The audience will be forced to question why he is killed, and the other Sharks are not.

Police

This production aims to denounce the role of the police as an institution, not two "bad cops." Krupke and Schrank could be cast as two White men, as traditionally written. However, this could be an opportunity to use "color-blind casting" and open the casting call to people of any color or gender identity. This could highlight that it is not the police's Whiteness that makes them target the sharks, but rather profoundly engrained systematic flaws. Casting must then consider how the audience would best perceive this idea and how it might come across as confusing to cast someone who does not appear to be White.



A note on audience perception

In the casting of the Sharks, it would be negligent to exclude Black actors, as this production is an examination of racial profiling. However, in casting Bernardo as an afro-Latinx performer, one must also consider how the audience will perceive this. It might be unclear whether or not they are all still supposed to be Puerto Rican. Since they all speak Spanish and share other cultural similarities, like their attire and mannerisms, it should hopefully be clear to any audience member, even if they don't know that Puerto Ricans can be blonde, tan, or dark-skinned.

Regardless, when casting this show, one suggestion might be to workshop different options in front of unbiased focus groups to gauge how a general audience might react to specific, nuanced ideas. This may be especially important for the police, who will play such a crucial role. We don't want anything to be lost from the story in casting decisions that could potentially distract or take the audience out of the world.



Ideas for Further Research

Ways in which this project can be further developed to become a fully-fledged production

Interviews

Comparing primary sources of interviews with police officers in the late 50s and today.

Newspapers

Comparing headlines involving the police/racial profiling in the late 50s and today.

Activism Over Time

How might elements of activism over time be incorporated/ play a role? For example, examining the recent mass protests with signage like "ACAB" or "BLM."

Lingering questions

Can the police be cast as actors of color? Female actors? How might audiences respond?
Should costumes gradually change or simply switch in Act 2?

Latinx Studies

How have Latinx communities specifically been historically affected by the police? How is this different/similar to ways in which Black communities have been affected?

Cast Discussions

In dealing with such a triggering topic, what are ways in which a director can ensure the cast is comfortable? How can this benefit the cast in navigating these discussions in the future?