

## **Ripped From The Headlines**

by

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# Ripped From The Headlines

## DESCRIPTION

Homophobia may be bred of fear and bigotry, but that does not excuse the violence it uses to exercise its terror. On the surface, this play is a meditation upon the death of Matthew Shepard, but it is also a meditation on the poison of intolerance and the loving rage that must confront it.

## CHARACTERS

- Wretched Fag, must be male, 20s
- The President, *male, 50ish*
- The Senator, *female, mid-40s*
- The Supreme Court Judge, *male, white, mid-60s*
- The Minister, *male, African-American, mid-40s*
- The Wyoming Man & Woman, *mid-30s*
- The T.V. Producer, *female, mid-30s, lesbian*

## SETTING

- A fence
- A theatre

## TIME

- Present

## MISCELLANEOUS

- Weathered fencing, large and strong enough to hold the weight of a body.
- A crown of thorns made of barbed wire.
- Sign with "Wretched Fag" on it, to hung around the neck of the WRETCHED FAG.
- Each character has a trademark item

- Ribbons for the PRESIDENT.
- Two eye patches for the SENATOR, one over each eye.
- A judicial robe cut into tatters and a broken gavel for the JUDGE.
- The MINISTER is in white face, but only the front -- no make-up below the jawline.
- WYOMING MAN & WOMAN have a length of chain around their necks, connecting them
- The PRODUCER wears a black half-mask (like Zorro) and a set of studio headphones with a microphone (one-ear, not two-ear).

- Bible for the MINISTER
- Beer bottle for WYOMING WOMAN; pool cue for WYOMING MAN
- Various other props as mentioned
- Other sounds are up to the discretion of the director.

## Ripped From The Headlines

Light comes up extreme downstage on the WRETCHED FAG. Music to match the scene. The WRETCHED FAG hangs on the fence wearing a leather coat and no shirt or pants. His underwear, boxers, is pulled down to his ankles, and he is shoeless. His body, from his face to his feet, is smeared with blood and dirt. He has a crown of barbed wire pushed on to his head. It is a picture straight out of a crucifixion Christ scene. Around his neck hangs a sign: "Wretched Fag."

Behind the WRETCHED FAG appears the PRESIDENT, his lapels festooned with ribbons of all colors in the shape of the prototypical AIDS red ribbon. These should be large and foolish-looking. The other characters will be scattered around the stage in various locations, up to the director, but they should be no more than three or four steps away from the WRETCHED FAG. Each stands in a separated pool of light. If possible, it would good if they also stood inside something like a hula hoop or even a chalk circle drawn on the floor.

PRESIDENT

I hope that in the grief of this moment for his family and in the shared outrage across America, we will once again search our hearts and do what we can to reduce our own fear and anxiety and anger at people who are different.

Sound to indicate the start of a race: starter's pistol, part of the fanfare from the Kentucky Derby, "Gentlemen, start your engines," movie "clapper," etc.

SENATOR

Now, it may not be --  
(air quotes)  
-- "PC" to say this --

JUDGE

The Court today refuses to review --

SENATOR

-- but it's a known fact --

JUDGE

-- the discrimination case from the Court of Appeals --

SENATOR

-- known to all my Senate colleagues --

JUDGE

Municipalities will be allowed --

Beat. ALL look at him.

JUDGE

Municipalities will be allowed to ban laws passed to protect gay people from discrimination.

Beat.

SENATOR

Known to all Christian one-hundred-percenters: --

JUDGE

In other words --

MINISTER

-- they can burn!

SENATOR

-- being a "fag," a "homo," is a sin.

SENATOR & MINISTER

Kill them all!

Beat.

PRESIDENT

I instituted "don't ask, don't tell" --

MINISTER

I don't hate the sin --

PRESIDENT

-- because it was the safest alternative --

MINISTER

I hate the sinner!

PRODUCER

Why not take out a full-page ad --

PRESIDENT

-- the safest alternative to demanding full equality --

PRODUCER

-- "Wanted: Fag Killers -- Full Employment."

JUDGE & PRESIDENT

-- safest alternative for me, that is.

JUDGE

The Court, of course, has provided relief --

WYOMING MAN

The fag-bashing starts later.

JUDGE

-- for "othered" peoples --

WYOMING WOMAN

He shouldn't have been in here.

JUDGE  
-- but "special preferences" --

WYOMING MAN  
Only real American beef around here.

JUDGE  
-- should not be given to marginal citizens.

Beat.

PRODUCER  
Difficult, fighting from inside the networks --

MINISTER  
They sashay across our televisions --

PRODUCER  
-- to get gay characters accepted --

SENATOR  
That filth from Hollywood --

PRODUCER  
-- to stop jokes about "burning faggots" --

SENATOR  
-- arguing they're normal --

PRODUCER  
-- you know, the bunch of sticks --

WYOMING MAN  
"Normal" is me doing it to her.

MINISTER  
No Adam and Steve --

PRESIDENT  
I have gays in my administration --

MINISTER  
-- it was Adam and Eve --

PRODUCER  
Of course, I haven't come out myself, yet --

SENATOR  
Others have sex addiction or are kleptomaniacs --

PRODUCER  
-- I don't have a script for that.

SENATOR  
-- all sorts of things wrong with people --

WYOMING WOMAN  
And me with him. That's normal.

MINISTER  
I would argue --

SENATOR  
-- but they've got to be set straight!

MINISTER  
-- that this "queer nation" --

PRODUCER  
Oh, you learn to be straight --

MINISTER  
-- is not really human -- do I hear an "Amen"?

ALL  
(except for the PRODUCER)  
Amen!

PRODUCER  
-- which is, of course, not straight at all --

SENATOR  
Make straight the way.

PRODUCER  
-- because you can't be straight-forward --

MINISTER  
-- not humans at all -- Amen!

ALL  
(except PRODUCER)  
Amen!

Beat.

PRESIDENT  
All right, perhaps I should have made the  
military toe the line --

MINISTER  
Sinners beyond saving --

WYOMING MAN  
We don't care that they beat him.

WYOMING WOMAN  
Said he looked like a scarecrow.

MAN & WOMAN  
(laughing)  
"If I only had a brain" --

Beat.

SENATOR  
Bible's very clear on this.

JUDGE  
Upholding the laws against sodomy --

WYOMING MAN  
(overlapping)  
They should've set him --

WYOMING WOMAN  
-- set him on fire!

JUDGE  
-- and the rush to deny them marriage --

PRODUCER  
Homos are, still, exotic blossoms --

JUDGE  
-- do create a hostile mood --

PRESIDENT  
-- but good order and discipline --

JUDGE  
-- good order and discipline is important --

PRODUCER  
-- the golden-hearted flaming queen --

PRESIDENT  
(shrugs)  
So what could I do?

JUDGE  
So what could we do?

PRESIDENT  
Though compared to him --  
(pointing to the SENATOR)  
-- I look pretty humane.

Beat.

MINISTER & SENATOR  
When they choose their degraded lifestyle --

MINISTER  
-- and it is a choice --

PRODUCER  
They think it's a choice --

SENATOR

My colleague, the honorable Senator Fag from --  
oh, I'm sorry --

WYOMING MAN

You can't respect a lower life form.

PRODUCER

But never a word about their flaming  
heterosexuality.

WYOMING WOMAN

At least if you kill a deer, you can eat it.

MINISTER

They deserve AIDS.

PRODUCER

Irony shatters against a stony heart.

MINISTER

And so we must make our choice --

JUDGE

It's ultimately up to the people.

SENATOR

Their end is what I mean.

MINISTER

And if they soil the flock --

PRESIDENT

I used what means I had.

MINISTER

-- they should be eliminated by any means  
necessary.

MAN & WOMAN

By any means at hand.

PRODUCER

It's hard to match means and ends --

JUDGE

Such imperfect means --

PRODUCER

-- when they mean your end.

JUDGE

-- to reach imperfect ends.

WYOMING MAN

(directly to the audience)

He shouldn't haven't been what he was or where he was. So why don't you all just fuck off? We did what we learned to do.

There is ten full seconds of silence: no one speaks or moves. At the end of that time there is a blinding flash of light and anything else the director wants to use to startle the audience. The WRETCHED FAG awakens. The rope drops from him; he pulls up his underwear and takes off his sign and hangs it on the fence. The next sequence of events will work this way:

- The FAG will walk to each person and speak.
- After he speaks, he slaps the person: not hard, but to affirm the connection between pain and awakening.
- The person will then blurt out a phrase, looking startled and abashed.
- The FAG will then throw/push/lead them toward the fence. If they hold props, they will be placed on the stage near their position.
- They should move in a stylized manner, and beginning at the fence, they will form a chain that will put them into the audience but keep them connected to the fence. The chain should have a stylized look to it as well, with the actors assuming body shapes and positions. It should look as if the people have taken the place of the FAG and in some way express the lines they have said.

The order in which the FAG talks to the others can be varied, depending on where people are placed by the director on stage.

FAG

(to the SENATOR)

I am your son.

SENATOR

We hold these truths to be self-evident --

FAG

(to the JUDGE)

I am your daughter.

JUDGE

The inherent dignity of the human family --

FAG

To the MINISTER. As he speaks, the FAG smears the whiteface. I am your brother and sister.

MINISTER

All men are created equal --

FAG

(to the WYOMING MAN)

I am your father.

WYOMING MAN  
A world in which human beings --

FAG  
(to the WYOMING WOMAN)  
I am your mother.

WYOMING WOMAN  
Shall enjoy freedom from fear --

FAG  
(to the PRESIDENT)  
I am the stranger you should protect.

PRESIDENT  
Certain unalienable rights --

FAG  
(to the PRODUCER)  
I am the stranger that could be you.

PRODUCER  
Act in a spirit of brotherhood.

At this point, all the actors have made their "chain." The FAG turns to the audience.

FAG  
It is so easy to forget. And if we forget, what is there left but to burn with shame?

The FAG steps to the audience and, randomly selecting a person, links that person to the chain made by the actors. He then links the audience member to another audience member, and that second audience member to a third audience member. He then indicates for everyone to do it. As he says the next lines, the FAG should pause to let the audience repeat each line and, if necessary, he should continue to urge people to link hands so that the lines and the linking of hands all happen at the same time. As the audience finishes the line, the actors will say, in unison, the lines they said earlier. Thus, the sequence should be:

- FAG says line.
- Audience repeats it.
- Actors say their lines.

FAG  
Repeat after me: I am your son.

AUDIENCE  
I am your son.

ACTORS  
We hold these truths to be self-evident --

FAG

I am your daughter.

AUDIENCE

I am your daughter.

ACTORS

The inherent dignity of the human family --

FAG

I am your brother and sister.

AUDIENCE

I am your brother and sister.

ACTORS

All men are created equal --

FAG

I am your father and mother.

AUDIENCE

I am your father and mother.

ACTORS

Shall enjoy freedom from fear --

FAG

I am the stranger you should protect.

AUDIENCE

I am the stranger you should protect.

ACTORS

Certain unalienable rights --

FAG

I am the stranger that could be you.

AUDIENCE

I am the stranger that could be you.

ACTORS

Act in a spirit of brotherhood.

The actors remain silent. On these next lines, the FAG should move close to the stage.

FAG

Repeat after me: It is so easy to forget.

(audience speaks)

And if we forget --

(audience speaks)

-- what is there left --

(audience speaks)

-- but to burn in shame?

The FAG holds up his hands as if to indicate he wants to speak alone.

FAG

Silence will not have the last word.

A blinding flash of light and whatever the director wants to use to startle the audience. The actors break their chain and quickly return to their circles and former attitudes, and the FAG to the fence, taking up his former position, though without the sign. Lights bump out, first on the actors, and then the FAG. This should be done very quickly so that the audience finds itself in the dark holding hands before they realize fully what has happened.