

Synthesis Paragraph:

Race in *West Side Story* has been strongly criticized for a variety of reasons. Puerto Ricans were insulted by the stereotypes portrayed in the musical. Despite the fact that Puerto Ricans were viewed as the main target of racial discrimination, Polish people could have argued that they felt this way as well. According to Charles P. Mitchell's article, "West Side Story, Filmography of Social Issues", many themes are discussed, but the theme of juvenile delinquency is heavily discussed. He discusses in his article that juvenile delinquency was a major issue and brings to attention the issues regarding conflicts with the police. As seen in *West Side Story*, the Jets have a song titled, "Gee Officer Krupke", where they sing about their own personal problems at home- which they use as an excuse for being a part of a gang and being delinquents. In singing this song they are insinuating their white privilege, meaning they can cause trouble and do unjust things, but get away with it for reasons that shouldn't justify their actions. As discussed in Mitchell's article throughout the 1950s, police brutality throughout the 1950s was a lot worse than it is today, despite the fact that it is still an issue. Segregation was still present in many parts of America in the 1950's as well as racism. Since this was just one of the conflicts in the 1950s, it was easy for people to view the portrayal of Puerto Ricans in *West Side Story* as morally just. Despite the fact that white privilege is a real issue, it is a stereotype that has been placed on the Polish gang in the musical. Moreover, the article, "Trouble in New York City by Warren Hoffman, discusses the roots of *West Side Story*. *West Side Story* was originally supposed to be named "East Side Story" and rather than the musical being about gang rivalries between a Puerto Rican gang and a Polish gang, it would have been based on the rivalries between a Jews and Christians. This article explains how the creators of *West Side Story* had no real knowledge about Puerto Ricans prior to writing the play. Many people have criticized the directors for "white-washing" the musical as they incorporated many basic stereotypes into the musical. It has been said a repeated amount of times that the play would have taken a different turn if at least one Puerto Rican would have taken a part in directing. In addition to this article, "Feeling Pretty", by Frances Negron-Muntaner discusses the many racial issues in *West Side Story*. Negron-Muntaner points out that the Puerto Rican characters in the musical are not even played by Puerto Rican actors. She also brings up the very interesting point that poverty and lower class in the Puerto Rican community is associated with death. Although both gangs in the musical took part in someone's death, people associated death and violence more with Puerto Ricans, as this is a typical stereotype. Even though "Feeling Pretty" includes many supporting details in relation to racism towards Puerto Ricans, it fails to acknowledge the issues of racism towards Polish-Americans. This article highlights all the issues in the musical with the portrayal of Puerto Ricans but does not explain how Polish people have been discriminated against. Polish people were associated with drinking and broken families in the musical, which is something that nobody really talks about when they watch the musical. Altogether, racism is a very controversial topic in *West Side Story*.