SIDNEY KINGSLEY is a playwright, but through his writing he has had many more careers—as a social and political activist, a health-care reformer, an advocate for children, a patriot, a visionary. This collection of Kingsley's award-winning plays fills a void in American dramatic publishing: while critical statements on Kingsley's work appear in the significant studies of American theatre and his plays continue to be produced, there has never been a standard edition of his major works. Of his nine professionally produced plays, *Men in White* (1933) received the Pulitzer Prize and the Theatre Club Award; *Dead End* (1935), the Theatre Club Award; *The Patriots* (1943), the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, Newspaper Guild Front Page Award, and Theatre Club Award; *Detective Story* (1949), the Edgar Allen Poe Award; and *Darkness at Noon* (1951), the New York Drama Critics Circle Award and the Donaldson Award. This collection provides the definitive edition of these plays, each with an introduction by Sidney Kingsley.

As a playwright who has found life "infinitely rich, poetic and dramatic,"1 Sidney Kingsley has used his naturalistic writing style to present major American social problems on the stage. His pioneering work for the stage led the way for new genres and character types in film and television: hospital and doctor dramas such as *General Hospital, Dr. Kildare, Ben Casey,* and *ER*; numerous clever bad boys, starting with the Dead End Kids; and the detectives and criminals populating shows such as *NYPD Blue.*

Born Sidney Kirshner on 22 October 1906, Sidney Kingsley grew up in New York City, the locale for most of his plays. He attended Cornell University, where he had the good fortune to encounter one of those rare teachers who sometimes change one's life—Alec Drummond. Drummond "was possessed by a vision, beautiful beyond words, by a dream called Theatre,"2 a
dream that became Kingsley's dream and life as well. Facing the constant lack of theatre resources at Cornell with which Drummond struggled, Kingsley wrote, acted, directed, and designed—experiences that would stand him well in the professional theatre world. He was a member of the dramatic club and of the freshman and varsity debate teams. He received the 94 Memorial Stage, a Cornell University prize in debate. Kingsley's first published play, *Wonder-Dark Epilogue*, about artist Eugene Travers and death, was a one-act produced at Cornell by the Cornell Dramatic Club in May 1928. In this play, Kingsley tried out some of the techniques and ideas he would later put to good use in *Darkness at Noon*: the flashback, the character reviewing his life as he approaches his death, and a setting that provides a variety of areas and levels for acting. In 1981 Kingsley returned to the topics of artists and death in *Falling Man*, produced by the Florida State University School of Theatre.

After graduating from Cornell, he acted briefly in a stock company and then appeared in *Broadway Express* on Broadway. But Kingsley really wanted to write for the stage and directed his efforts toward that end, beginning quite successfully with *Men in White*, closely followed by *Dead End*.

*Ten Million Ghosts* (1936), Kingsley's third Broadway play, was a technically complex production about conspiracy and the hypocrisy of French and German branches of a family of munitions magnates during World War I.
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The Alvin Theatre is now offering a spectacle, a rather dull and pompous spectacle, but a dangerous one: the spectacle of two minds [Koestler's and Kingsley's] completely stripped of all integrity. . . . Its [the play's] current purposes are clear. They are first, to contribute to the lowest level of anti-Soviet hysteria—the Hearst level. Second, to equate fascism and Communism. Third, to present the theory that the Soviet Union invents non-existent spies and saboteurs. . . . Fourth, and perhaps most important, Darkness at Noon is an attempt to justify the sniveling cowardice, the colossal duplicity, and the utter moral bankruptcy of Koestler's heroes: the Trotzkyite criminals. . . .

Kingsley, Koestler, and Broadway made no reply, but Hearst had both the means and the will to respond. Howard Rushmore, writing for the New York Journal American, retaliated by citing the Daily Worker's review as the "best proof that the play is a damaging and effective indictment of communism." Lauter replied by criticizing Rushmore "of the Hearst press—a press which is notorious throughout the world for its gutter journalism and cheap sensationalism," for his championing of the play. Indeed, in the salvos fired by two diametrically opposed ideologies, Kingsley and the play almost became lost as the discussion veered into an arena not usually frequented by theatre issues.

Speculation began as early as the spring of 1950 that film star Claude Rains would play the lead role in Darkness at Noon, which was indeed the case. While it was a most successful role for him, it was also a difficult transition from film to the stage, according to Kingsley. And perhaps there was more behind Rains's attitude than nervousness in returning to the stage: Kingsley felt at the time that communists had "even worked on Claude Rains in California, trying to frighten him, and telling him if he appeared in it it would ruin his career." Yet it was certainly a successful undertaking. Many critics joined Richard Watts in praising Rains's portrayal of the Communist Rubashov. John Chapman called his performance "remarkable physically . . . [and] even more notable intellectually." Alexander Scourby received excellent notices in his role as Rubashov's comrade and sometime friend Ivanoff, while newcomer Walter J. Palance (Jack Palance of later film and television fame) was praised for his "chillingly wonderful performance as Gletkin." Kim Hunter as Luba received generally good reviews. Although several critics were not overly enthusiastic, others found her work pleasing, including Robert Coleman who felt that she had "add[ed] another fine page to her biography with a forthright and tender portrayal." Kingsley and Frederick Fox also were praised in their capacities as director and designer.

In February 1951 Jack Gould wrote a New York Times article on a current necessity "in broadcasting [that] is the program which deals effectively
and maturely with the evils of communism.” Using Kingsley’s *Darkness at Noon* and Robert E. Sherwood’s *There Shall Be No Night* as examples, Gould pointed out that “the fate of a single individual or family can be a far more eloquent editorial than even the most impassioned preachment on the Soviet menace.”

A week later, Walter Winchell announced that *Darkness at Noon* was to become a Voice of America broadcast. In addition, it would have the distinction of having all regular programs canceled for its broadcast, something previously done only for major speeches by the president of the United States. The anticipated audience for this broadcast was estimated at 100,000,000 listeners in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, Latin America, and the Far East.

In an effort to reach an even broader audience in the United States “because of the topical immediacy of the anti-Communist theme,” Kingsley and the Playwrights Company decided to release *Darkness at Noon* to colleges simultaneously with the Broadway production. This new idea in play production foreshadowed by more than a decade the American Playwrights Theatre, founded in 1963, whose purpose was to provide first-run plays by established playwrights to college, university, regional, and community theatres.

*Darkness at Noon* followed the pattern established by Kingsley’s earlier works and took its place in the broader context of discussion on politics, communism, human rights, and betrayal of one’s country. The *New York Socialist Call*, in decrying the dismal working conditions in Russian mines as described by recent refugees, felt that Kingsley had allowed his “stagecraft to obscure rather thoroughly the intellectual content of the novel.” *Darkness at Noon*, both play and novel, were cited as providing needed answers in a consideration of Alger Hiss’s guilt and motivation for his actions. The play was discussed as revealing “the Soviet mentality” in an article on the support of unions for the U.S. administration’s foreign policy, in particular, that for Russia. The unions also provided the unusual theatre audience that Kingsley’s plays tended to draw with “a dozen New York unions [buying] more than 10,000 seats.” An American businessman, after seventeen months in a Budapest prison on espionage charges, compared his life there to prison life in *Darkness at Noon*: “I didn’t have much else to do but listen to the sound of footsteps.” Even entertainment columnist Earl Wilson compared the torture endured by a Hungarian political prisoner to that of Rubashov.

Conclusion

In examining the negative criticism of Kingsley’s plays, one finds some common threads: criticism of his treatment of personal relationships and of
Japanese for *Detective Story*; and Arabic, German, and three different Spanish translations for *Darkness at Noon*. Only *Dead End* seems not to have been translated, perhaps because of the difficulty in rendering New York street slang, as well as the frequent phonetic spellings in the play, into another language.
In addition to winning awards for specific plays, Sidney Kingsley has been the recipient of numerous awards recognizing his body of work. In 1951 he was given the Academy of Arts and Letters Medal of Merit. He was inducted into the Theater Hall of Fame in 1983. In 1986, also from the Academy of Arts and Letters, Kingsley received the Gold Medal for Drama, which is given, not annually, but as it is appropriate, for a body of work that demonstrates outstanding accomplishment in the field. And in 1988 he received the William Inge Award for Distinguished Achievement in the American Theatre, an honor whose recent recipients include Edward Albee, Peter Shaffer, Wendy Wasserstein, and Terrence McNally.

Men in White

Kingsley's first widely successful work was *Men in White*, produced by the Group Theatre in 1933. This play about hospital life dealt with one young intern's struggle to fulfill his commitment to society and medicine while being tempted by the easy medical practice and social advantages offered by his wealthy fiancée. His brief affair with a sympathetic nurse ends disastrously when she obtains an illegal, unsafe abortion.

Although it was acted by such theatre greats as Luther Adler, Morris Carnovsky, Sanford Meisner, Elia Kazan, and Clifford Odets, Group Theatre codirector Harold Clurman wrote that "Kingsley's *Men in White* was a well-constructed play with an interesting background, but the lofty quality given it by the Group Theatre company was not due to the excellence of its individual members but to the direction of Lee Strasberg." In fact, Clurman was pleased with the play and production on several levels: it was a critical and popular success, and its box office provided the funds for him to make a theatre trip to Russia in 1934; it proved to be what Clurman called, in a defense of Method acting, "a 'classic' Method production."

Kingsley's meticulous approach to research and writing is apparent in *Men in White*, establishing the way he continued to work on all his projects. Optioned four times before finally being produced by the Group Theatre, *Men in White* was a critical, as well as popular, success. More than one critic rejoiced that the theatre was not dead after all, despite the Great Depression and its resulting effects, and Kingsley's play was the proof. In fact, in retrospect on the theatre in New York during 1933–34, Burns Mantle felt that the season signaled a return of the theatre to a state of health, and that *Men in White* was one of the early heralds of that return. Robert Garland's "Poll of Twelve Critics Reveals Their Favorite Plays and Players" found that ten of twelve critics considered *Men in White* one of the best plays of the year, the dissenters being Gilbert W. Gabriel and John Mason Brown.
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Brooks Atkinson found *Men in White* to be “a good, brave play,” one that, while not perfect, “has force in the theatre . . . , warm with life and high in aspiration.” Nevertheless, he questioned Kingsley’s adherence to medical terminology as overly strict and the seduction scene as “hackneyed.” In contrast to Atkinson, Eugene Burr of *Billboard* felt that in the seduction scene *Men in White* “reached[d] its finest psychological heights.”

John Mason Brown was the major naysayer among the critics of *Men in White*, and he continued to be for most of Kingsley’s productions, lauding the Group’s production but disliking the play. In fact, most critics acknowledged Kingsley’s inexperience in the professional theatre but found both play and production worthy of praise. Arthur Pollock wrote that *Men in White* “shines continuously with a steady intelligence, is made notable by a crisp simplicity and austere skill, in spite of the fact that the author, Sidney Kingsley, has not heretofore been known to be a dramatist.” Joseph Wood Krutch, admitting to not being predisposed to enthusiasm for *Men in White*, instead found it, “on the contrary, so immediately interesting, so completely absorbing, that one forgets to ask whether or not it is ‘significant’ or ‘important.’ And that, I submit, is one of the signs by which a genuine work of art may be recognized.”

Nor was *Men in White*’s popularity limited to New York. The touring company also received an enthusiastic response from such writers as Claudia Cassidy in Chicago: “*Men in White* is one of those rare plays that pleases actors, audiences and producers—it is written with a shrewd blend of zeal for a cause and zest for the stage.” Following immediately upon its U.S. success, the play was produced in London, in Vienna, and in Budapest, where Kingsley found the production to be outstanding. *Men in White* opened in London at the Lyric Theatre in June 1934 (with Merton Hodge’s adaptation to accommodate British medical practice), where it received good reviews from theatre as well as medical critics, although Kingsley himself felt that the anglicization was not “entirely successful,” and the Lord Chamberlain had required some changes, such as the elimination of the scalpel and the placement of a screen around the surgical table, that inevitably affected the realistic presentation. At almost the same time, the film of *Men in White*, with Clark Gable, Myrna Loy, and Jean Hersholt, opened in London to good reviews. While the play and film were running in London, the censor in Germany banned the play because “it shows doctors in a light contrary to the spirit of Nazi Germany.”

In *Men in White* Kingsley did what was clearly characteristic of him and what has marked his long career—to present on the stage a major human concern boldly and without apology or disguise—in this first instance, the issue of legalized abortion and the consequences of unregulated illegal abor-
tion. It was not until forty years after the premiere of *Men in White* that the famous U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion in the United States, and the incendiary issue of abortion continues to be debated. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that Kingsley showed great strength of purpose and bravery in raising the question long before the public was prepared to confront it. And while it is to the credit of the critics of the time that the abortion did not alter their assessments of the play, it must also be noted that they were not as eager as Kingsley to discuss it. With Brooks Atkinson as a notable exception, most avoided even the use of the word "abortion," either refraining from mentioning Nurse Dennin's illegal abortion and its disastrous outcome or referring to the situation euphemistically or circuitously.

As was also true of Kingsley's other works, *Men in White* attracted a critical audience bound by a common thread, in this case, their work in the field of health care. While these doctors and nurses surely attended other theatrical productions as individuals, *Men in White* brought them to the theatre for shared reasons—for self-examination, pride in the best representatives of their professions, and gratitude for Kingsley's understanding of the difficulties of their professional and personal lives. While two scenes in the play (one in which Ferguson stops a doctor from administering insulin to a patient and instead gives glucose; the other, the surgical scene of Nurse Dennin's hysterectomy) caused discussion among some health-care professionals with respect to the appropriateness of treatment or the reality of the situation, other doctors and nurses gave the play their wholehearted approval.

Kingsley became a highly desirable speaker for doctors' groups and was asked to participate in a radio broadcast to raise funds for the United Hospital Fund of New York. Both the stage and film versions of *Men in White* were favorably reviewed in medical journals and bulletins. The *Medical Record* found it to be "of especial value to wives and fiancées of physicians and those who depend or expect to depend on a physician's income for present or future comforts. . . . The play should be recommended by every medical man, for it gives to the public a clearer idea of the ideals and the problems of our profession, than could years of close contact between the physician and his patients." The *Weekly Bulletin of the St. Louis Medical Society* declared that Kingsley "has caught the spirit of medicine and has portrayed as has never been done before on any stage the emotions, the heartbreaks, the struggles, the ambitions, the inhibitions, of the profession of today in the big city . . . with a pitying exactitude and truthfulness that we have never seen before."

Reviews of the script of *Men in White* as published by Covici-Friede were
slightly more mixed than those for the play, but nonetheless were generally favorable. Charles A. Wagner wrote that there was an “almost complete lack of memorable lines,” but “technically and structurally, the play is a perfect whole, riding dramatically, even melodramatically, to logical wave on wave of a tidal force in professional duty and ambition pitted against the homing instinct.” Almost diametrically opposed to Wagner’s viewpoint was John Chamberlain’s: “If one can forget the cardboard structure of Men in White, however, the individual lines are often amazingly effective.”

This disagreement among the critics carried over into a somewhat different arena than the daily newspaper—that of the Pulitzer Prize. The jury, made up of Clayton Hamilton, Walter Prichard Eaton, and Austin Strong, recommended Maxwell Anderson’s Mary of Scotland for the prize; however, the Pulitzer advisory committee declined to accept the jury’s recommendation and instead chose Men in White. While not an unprecedented move in Pulitzer history, this situation precipitated a good deal of discussion by the theatre critics. Brooks Atkinson voted with the jury for Mary of Scotland, although in reviewing Dead End two years later he wrote, “When the Pulitzer judges gave Mr. Kingsley a prize for Men in White, they picked a first-rate man.” Perhaps more inclined to look at audience preference, Burns Mantle found it “significant...that while the specialists of the jury selected Mary of Scotland the playgoers of the larger Pulitzer committee reversed their decision and substituted Men in White” for as playgoers, not experts, the advisory committee judged Men in White to be “the original American play, performed in New York, which shall best represent the educational value and power of the stage.”

It is quite likely that the dispute over Men in White was the impetus for some 1934 changes in the Pulitzer process. According to William Lyon Phelps, the addition to the prize of the phrase “preferably one dealing with American life” aided the committee when they might have to choose “between (let us say) two plays that might be of about equal artistic merit.” In other words, a play such as Men in White, set in America, would have an advantage over a play such as Anderson’s Mary of Scotland. In addition, a procedural change was instituted regarding the manner in which the jury’s work was communicated. Rather than select a single play, the jurists were thenceforth to submit a short list in priority order, a method that had “always been desirable” but had not been in practice.

Dead End

Kingsley’s second major production was Dead End, which frankly and shockingly put both profanity in the mouths of children and the hope-
lessness of poverty and slum life on the stage. With the major success of *Dead End*, Kingsley proved to the critics that he was an American playwright of significance. According to Whitney Bolton: “There can no longer be the slightest doubt (and there had been plenty) that Sidney Kingsley was man and dramatist enough to follow up his first and Pulitzer prize-winning play, *Men in White*, with a drama of equal brilliance. His new play is *Dead End*, a thing of beautiful strength, of ferocity, contempt and possessed of a rolling, cumulative force.” Joseph Wood Krutch praised Kingsley as a “first-rate theatrical craftsman,” stating, “It is hard to see how [the corrupting influence of poverty] could be made to serve as the basis for a more rapidly moving or more exciting melodrama than the one which Mr. Kingsley has written.”

With this second solid success as a playwright, recognition also came to Mr. Kingsley as a fine director: “of an expertness seldom equaled”; “free of false moves”; “[Kingsley’s] directing keeps its vitality, clings hard to a claim of the finest pieces of directing we’ve seen in recent seasons.” Even John Mason Brown, Kingsley’s harshest critic, praised the direction, although he credited that activity erroneously to Norman Bel Geddes.

As did Stark Young and Eugene Burr, Brown also lauded both Bel Geddes’s production and set: “it can safely be said that no native playwright of our day has owed more to, or been more fortunate in, the productions his dramas have received than Mr. Kingsley has been”; and “Mr. Geddes’s waterfront scene is a triumph of realistic designing. . . . It is breath-taking, alive with atmosphere, brilliantly contrived, fortunate in the angle from which it is seen, and full of both acting opportunities and illusion.” Percy Hammond, on the other hand, felt that the stunning set was “the play’s most artificial component, half real and half palpable counterfeit,” but consolingly went on to say, “Any setting of any school of scene-making would probably seem false in contrast to writing, acting and directing of the integrity that makes *Dead End* important and successful.”

The 1935–36 season was an impressive one. It included Robert Emmet Sherwood’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *Idiot’s Delight*, as well as Maxwell Anderson’s *Winterset*, given the first award of the prize established by the New York theatre critics in response to their earlier disagreement with the Pulitzer committee. Nevertheless, *Dead End* showed well in the usual rankings as number two in Robert Garland’s best plays list and appearing in *The Best Plays, 1935–1936*.

Kingsley brought the experiences of his own childhood to bear in writing *Dead End*, particularly in the language used. Years after the play, while Kingsley was serving in the U.S. Army, some of his fellow soldiers decided to use some spicy language to needle the quiet writer. To their great surprise,
he came back with a mouthful worthy of a Dead End Kid and, to their even greater surprise, informed them that he had written the book. While a number of critics noted the profane and graphic language in *Dead End*, either simply mentioning it or questioning the need for its use, most accepted and respected Mr. Kingsley's commitment to realism. Nevertheless, that language put the play on another theatre list in 1936—that of the Catholic Theatre Movement, which found *Dead End*, along with *Boy Meets Girl*, *The Children's Hour*, *Mulatto*, *One Good Year*, *A Room in Red and White*, and *Tobacco Road* to be "wholly objectionable." And yet, *Dead End* was wholly truthful. Kingsley again performed his characteristically exhaustive research. In looking at the hopelessness depicted in the photographs Kingsley acquired during his work, one understands what fueled the passion with which he wrote. Photographs of homeless children, street kids creating games with whatever was available—fire hydrants and piers—families receiving handouts, and shoe-shine boys are filed alongside photographs of juvenile delinquents, the bodies of John Dillinger, the Barkers, "Baby Face" Nelson, "Pretty Boy" Floyd, and Bonnie Parker, interiors of reformatories and prisons, and the electric chair at Sing Sing. Kingsley described his commitment and conviction in his writing in a radio interview: "... the root of every private life has its basis in social conditions, so that any play about human beings, living today, must of necessity consider, either to a lesser or greater degree, contemporary social conditions." *Dead End* was compared by the critics to Elmer Rice's *Street Scene* as well as, inevitably, to Anderson's *Winterset*. Comments ranged from non-judgmental noting of their similarities and the differences within those similarities to strong partisan stands for one play or the other. Burns Mantle called *Dead End* "another dramatic exposure as was Elmer Rice's *Street Scene*... with the brooding gloom of Maxwell Anderson's *Winterset* without the Anderson verse to give it glamour," while Gilbert Gabriel found in *Dead End* and *Winterset* a "picturesqueness common to both... common vitality, too, a kindred savagery of themes." The primary criticism made by several critics was their perception of a weak and conventional romantic subplot involving Gimpty and Kay. Nevertheless, the dramatic strength of *Dead End*'s message and social statement was compelling. Brooks Atkinson predicted that "*Dead End* is a play that will be missed only by the feeble-minded among those who pretend to be interested in the theater or in the poor or in intelligence or in the way this ruthless world wags—and need not wag at all." In fact, the stunning realism of *Dead End* confirmed Kingsley's commitment to writing plays that dug below the surface, not only to reveal social
problems that many would rather have ignored, but to force society and government to address those problems. He did not pander to a well-to-do theatre audience: as Burns Mantle said, *Dead End* "provides another prod to the self-sufficient who look upon their tax receipts as complete vindication that they are giving their all for the betterment of the country and the protection of its future citizens." Nor did Kingsley rely on the audience's powers of perception—he made his message unmistakably clear.

In finding and communicating that realism, Kingsley was supported to a significant extent by his actors, the seasoned professionals as well as the child actors. John Anderson found that "the kids are all incredibly right and persuasive in their performances." For Gilbert W. Gabriel, there was "not a single one from the ages of (let's say) 16 to 60 who is not absolutely, unalterably right." The Samuel Goldwyn film of *Dead End* included the boys from the original cast, and the "Dead End Kids" completed the transition some of them had begun on stage from being street toughs to playing street toughs. They made over 80 films in several film series, including "Dead End Kids and Little Tough Guys," "East Side Kids," and the "Bowery Boys."

Again, as with *Men in White*, Kingsley found a nontheatrical constituency seeking an articulate voice. That the voice was that of a playwright, rather than that of a legislator or journalist, mattered not—the public heard the message, either firsthand in the theatre or from numerous other sources. Even Eleanor Roosevelt cited *Dead End* in discussing the housing problem.

In newspaper articles on juvenile delinquency, poverty, low-cost housing, slums, youth clubs, child welfare, and workers' strikes, in publications from the *New York Times* to the *Daily Worker*, *Dead End* was praised, cited as true testimony, and appropriated to numerous causes. One of the more interesting appearances of the play in the nontheatrical press was in coverage of a strike threatened by some New York City housewives that there would be "no more babies until better housing were provided." *Dead End* was credited with influencing this idea.

Humorous or not, the problem was real, and out of the awareness raised of the inadequacy of housing and the spotlight cast on the related health, safety, and social issues, the Wagner Housing Bill (S. 4424) was passed by the United States Congress "to provide financial assistance to the States and political subdivisions thereof for the elimination of unsafe and insanitary housing conditions, for the development of decent, safe, and sanitary dwellings for families of low income, and for the reduction of unemployment and the stimulation of business activity, to create a United States Housing Authority, and for other purposes." And perhaps the passage of that bill
The Patriots

*The Patriots,* which won the New York Drama Critics Circle award for 1942–43, was a four-year project for Kingsley, finished during his service in the army during World War II. The playwright was deeply concerned about the dissension he saw globally and in so many areas of society: “dissension is being whipped up between us and our Allies; party hates are being aggravated. North and South, farmer and labor and capital are being pitted one against the other, religious and racial hostilities are being sharpened to a dangerous degree.” Rather than write a contemporary war play to air his concerns, he chose the period following the American Revolution when the difficult work of building a democracy that could survive was under way, a time of political and social instability. Jefferson, as secretary of state and friend of the people, and Hamilton, as secretary of the Treasury and royalist, held opposing views on how to accomplish the task and were frequently at odds. Kingsley dramatized their differences of opinion regarding the nature of the new nation as well as methods to stabilize it. The play ends with Hamilton supporting Jefferson, his longtime rival, against Aaron Burr for the presidency. *The Patriots* points out that national unity is established by contributions from different people with varying methods of reaching the common goal in a form of government. In Jefferson's “We are all republicans—we are all federalists,” echoed by a statement in the prospectus of the *New York Evening Post* (established by Hamilton) “that honest and virtuous men are to be found in each party,” Kingsley found the perfect sentiment and setting through which to express his concerns.

Kingsley's choice to set *The Patriots* in an earlier period was a wise one because American audiences in the first years of the U.S. involvement in the war did not want to see war plays. Burns Mantle's assessment of theatre audiences over the 1941–42 and 1942–43 seasons was that “[t]hey did not care for, nor would they support, plays written on war themes and plays reproducing, however impressively, an active wartime realism.”

Unlike *Men in White* and *Dead End,* very realistic productions of their own present times, *The Patriots* is set in the historical past, built on a partially documented and partially imagined relationship between two of the founding fathers of the United States—Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton—with George Washington as their sometime mediator. Kingsley wrote of Washington as having "been deified out of the human race," and
the same sort of immutable character was assigned to Jefferson and Hamilton, although both were vilified as well as deified. Kingsley again brought his exhaustive research techniques to the task of first cutting through the mythology that had arisen around each man in the ensuing years, then determining as carefully as possible their relationship from contemporary documentation, and finally extrapolating the missing pieces of the relationship from the existing evidence. In the end, he felt that he had fairly treated the men and their impact on the new democracy.

In 1974 John Wharton, member of The Playwrights Producing Company and its legal counsel, remembered that Maxwell Anderson had brought Kingsley and an early draft of *The Patriots* to the company. Wharton did not specifically mention Elmer Rice's opposition to the play, which Kingsley describes in his introduction, but he did note that "there was still some hesitation on the part of some of the playwright-members" and that he and the manager were concerned about the cost of the production. While the order of the players is somewhat obscure (Burns Mantle states that Rowland Stebbins wanted to produce *The Patriots* and sought out the Playwrights Company as coproducer; Wharton says that Stebbins entered the picture after the company had already begun consideration of the script), Rowland Stebbins and the Playwrights Company did collaborate on the successful production of *The Patriots*. Because of his commitment to the U.S. armed services, Kingsley was unable to direct the play, a job taken on by Shepard Traube; nevertheless, Kingsley was able to put in appearances from time to time at rehearsals to work through problems.

In general, the critics were very supportive of *The Patriots*, awarding it the New York Drama Critics Circle Award. In the inaugural volume of George Jean Nathan's *The Theatre Book of the Year*, *The Patriots* received honors as the best full-length American play, as did Cecil Humphreys's depiction of George Washington as the best male performance. While some noted problems in the structure or writing of the play, those same critics praised Kingsley's selection of material and the striking parallels of that material with the war years: "In writing of the past, Mr. Kingsley has written most excellently of the immediate present"; "though Mr. Kingsley, beset with all the difficulties of a dramatist turned historian, has hardly caught the countenance of history, he has found its pulse and at times its voice, and written a play that is steadily interesting and occasionally eloquent and dramatic"; "the violence and importance of the conflict, the vivid personalities and the issues involved gave it an absorbing interest. . . . Altogether these elements go to make up an evening in the theatre which owes more to history than to drama, but which is, in any case, thoughtful, provocative and pertinent"; "Sidney Kingsley has written a stirring, eloquent and timely
stage biography.”

Samuel Grafton, political columnist for the *New York Post*, gleefully praised Kingsley’s putting Thomas Jefferson, rather than a contemporary figure, onstage because it “gives [the politicians] the worrisome feeling that he is talking about social security, and a decent peace, even though his dialogue never steps out of chronological bounds in these haunting and thrilling scenes.”

As with *Dead End* and *Men in White*, Kingsley sparked audience interest in nontheatrical circles. *The Patriots* and Kingsley were invited to play a major role in the birthday celebration of Thomas Jefferson in Washington, D.C., and the dedication of the Jefferson statue by sculptor Rudolph Evans. The play was given in the Coolidge Auditorium of the Library of Congress, where “a distinguished audience thrilled to the presentation.”

In addition to the strongly positive feelings that many audience members had for *The Patriots*, Kingsley also managed to attract attention from a very unified opposition—the Hamilton Club. In a pamphlet circulated by the club in response to *The Patriots*’s playing the Library of Congress, Kingsley was decried as a “non-commissioned upstart, who so brazenly incriminates an intrepid Major-General of the Army of the Revolution.” In fact, others were also taken to task: “But it is unmitigated shame, when a playwright, an aping coterie of critics, the Librarian of Congress [Archibald MacLeish] and a Justice of the Supreme Court [Felix Frankfurter] make this laceration of a Founding Father a Roman holiday!”

In casting the play, Kingsley chose several radio actors, an action that John Wharton, at least, regretted. Although these actors gave excellent auditions due to their practice in making something out of a script quickly, Wharton felt that some of them never developed their roles past that first quick characterization. The reviews for Raymond Edward Johnson, the radio actor playing Jefferson, tended to be good, noting a physical resemblance to Jefferson and particularly complimenting his voice and reading, such as his delivery of Jefferson’s inaugural address. Nevertheless, Ward Morehouse gave him a mixed review: “a curiously uneven performance. In some scenes he was awkward but in many others he was genuinely moving”; and other critics concurred. Cecil Humphreys was widely praised as George Washington—“a minor masterpiece of stage characterization at its best,” according to Burns Mantle. House Jameson as Hamilton received generally good notices, and Juano Hernandez, who had played the title role of *John Henry* on the radio, was praised as Jupiter. Kingsley’s wife, Madge Evans, was complimented for her performance as Patsy. The reviews were mixed for many of the smaller roles.

While Warner Brothers, closely following the original stage production, announced a forthcoming film production of *The Patriots*, it was never
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made. Nevertheless, twenty years later, the script, adapted by Robert Har-
tung, did make it to the television screen as a Hallmark Hall of Fame pro-
duction. According to Richard F. Shepard, the production “effected a rare
and fine combination of television's much-vaunted but seldom-linked func-
tions of entertaining and informing.” Charlton Heston, playing Jefferson,
“captured the statesmanship” but not “the warmth and weariness of the
man.”

The Patriots toured North America very successfully, receiving good re-
views in Boston, Providence, Hartford, Toronto, Buffalo, Philadelphia,
Rochester, Baltimore, St. Louis, Washington, Richmond, Wilmington, Cin-
cinnati, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, Cleveland, Madison, Columbus, Milwau-
kee, Chicago, and Detroit. Some critics who had seen the New York
production as well as the touring production preferred the latter. E. B. Rad-
cliffe of the Cincinnati Enquirer liked the restaged prologue, but missed the
fire generated during the Declaration of Independence scene “when voices
of aroused debaters came from all parts of the house, thus making the audi-
ence a direct party to the Jeffersonian fight for an ideal.”

The tour ran with an almost entirely new cast: of the major roles, only
Cecil Humphreys remained as Washington. When it came back to New York
City for an appearance at City Center, the play was well received even
by Burton Rascoe, who had been extremely negative about the Broadway
production. Rascoe stated that the script had been revised for the better.
An examination of multiple copies of script drafts, including very early and
middle versions, the production script, and the published version of the play,
does not support Rascoe's statement that those substantial revisions, espe-
cially in act II, scene 1, were, in fact, made. The script did undergo some
minor revisions, as well as a major revision from the earliest drafts, then
entitled Thomas Jefferson, which included the character of Maria Cosway,
a romantic interest for Jefferson. That subplot was eliminated in the produc-
tion and published versions; however, the scene to which Rascoe referred
remained constant. Perhaps in viewing The Patriots after an absence of
eleven months and with entirely new casting for Jefferson and Hamilton,
Rascoe simply saw a new set of actors making characters their own and
distinctly different from the first cast, while speaking the original words.

Detective Story

Detective Story, produced by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse, was di-
rected by Kingsley himself. Set in a detective squad room of a police precinct
populated by the amazing variety of people Kingsley found in real life, the
play deals with issues of theft, paranoia, illegal abortion, and personal ob-
session. Foreshadowing *Darkness at Noon*, *Detective Story* warns against the abuse of power, whether by the individual or the state. In preparation for this play, Kingsley again immersed himself in on-site research, attaching himself to a New York police precinct for study.

The play takes place in that milieu, pulling many small stories together in support of the main story—Detective McLeod's unrelenting pursuit of an illegal abortionist who, unbeknownst to McLeod, had aborted his wife Mary's illegitimate child before they met and married. Finally, caught between his love for Mary and his inability to accept her past, McLeod is forced to recognize the truths she hursts at him: “You think you’re on the side of the angels? You’re not! You haven’t even a drop of ordinary human forgiveness in your whole nature. . . . You’re everything you’ve always said you hated in your own father.”

Having lost Mary and his chance at humanity, McLeod loses his life during an escape attempt by the burglar Charley.

That Kingsley again succeeded in creating a real-life situation, intriguing because of that reality, is clear from the enthusiastic critical response. Interestingly, a few of the critics, as former police-beat reporters, were well qualified to review the play as an accurate representation of a police station squad room as well as a successful theatre work. Having been on the police beat, John Chapman and Robert Coleman vouched for the play's authenticity; Chapman called Kingsley's invented 21st Precinct station “typical of them all,” acknowledging at the same time that the play had “a deceptive naturalness which conceals the know-how of an experienced and intelligent dramatist.” Coleman praised the playwright/director, producers, and cast for a play with “heart, thrills and humanity.” In agreement, George Jean Nathan, having had “the honor of knowing more or less intimately all kinds of detectives,” felt that Kingsley's squad room was full of “the genuine article caught from the flesh: the hard, direct, and inexorable type; the tough-fibred but genial; the plodding but restless and impatient; the calmly dutiful.” In fact, the play was so realistic that Chapman was impelled to inform readers that the playwright was not a detective, as Burns Mantle in 1933 had been obliged to let them know that Kingsley was not a doctor.

Of the critics who had never had (or did not own up to having had) police-beat experience, the response was also enthusiastic. Richard Watts found that Kingsley's “pungent and fascinating detail, . . . interesting, dramatic and thoughtful narrative, . . . and racy and colorful characters” made up “one of the season's most triumphant combinations of a good show and a good play.” In a season that included *Death of a Salesman*, *Anne of the Thousand Days*, *Summer and Smoke*, *Life with Mother*, *Kiss Me, Kate*, and *South Pacific*, this was indeed no small praise. Robert Garland found Kingsley's police detectives “as blood-filled and believable as were his bad guys in
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Dead End and his good guys in Men in White," men who "in turn, deal believably with us all-too-human human beings."71

Among the few less-than-enthusiastic reviews, Brooks Atkinson compared Kingsley with Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller, concluding that Kingsley was unable to "express ideas so deeply and forcefully [as Williams and Miller] because he is imprisoned by his method [naturalism]." However, he did admit that, "beginning with Ibsen, it is nevertheless a method that has resulted in some trenchant pieces of work, and Detective Story is one of the best." Several critics, including Ward Morehouse (the Sun), John Chapman (this time for the Daily News), and Wolcott Gibbs (the New Yorker) noted a kinship to Hecht and MacArthur's The Front Page: a similarity in "uproar and raucousness," "clatter, clutter and impudence," and "much the same place spiritually."72

A study of theatre criticism by writers/reporters for the popular media is interesting both theatrically and socially because it provides us directly with their views of the play and its production elements, but also indirectly with the barometer of issues that may be acceptably addressed in a widely distributed print forum. In contrast to the reviewers of 1933's Men in White, by 1949 virtually all the writers used the words "abortion" and "abortionist" in their coverage of Detective Story, without apology or circumlocution.

Ironically, Paramount, as with the rest of the film industry under its censorship code, had to change the abortion issue in Detective Story. Instead of being an abortionist, in the film Schneider becomes a doctor who delivers illegitimate or unwanted babies. While this alteration does not hold up on a contemporary viewing of the film, it seems to have been perfectly acceptable and comprehensible to film reviewers in 1951.73 Presumably, the movie-going public also understood the euphemism for abortion. Certainly, lines from the film such as McLeod's comments on Schneider's "baby farm grist mill," his biting statement that Schneider would "take care of both mother and child for a fee," and Tami Giacoppetti's "the baby was born dead"74 suggest strongly a situation more sinister than the provision of obstetrical care for unwed mothers. In any event, the film followed the play's popularity and was selected as one of the top ten films of the year by the New York Film Critics.75

As usual by this time for Kingsley, Detective Story's audiences and supporters again included a population who were probably not regular theatregoers—large numbers of police, the same ones who had been the trainers for Kingsley during his research period and later for Ralph Bellamy in his research for the role of McLeod. For the tryout in Philadelphia, the police of that city provided authentic supplies, such as fingerprint paper, for the production. The chief of police went so far as to check, after the play had transferred to New York, to see if they needed anything.76
For a play with a large cast, almost all the actors received remarkable notices, a number of the critics apologizing for not being able to single out every outstanding performance. Ralph Bellamy as McLeod was praised widely by the critics, more than one identifying this role as his best to date, calling it a performance with "stature and dignity, evoking pity as well as terror, . . . a personal triumph," "magnificently played," an "unswerving portrayal [that] never fails the script." In fact, the role of McLeod was a significant one for Bellamy and a major change from his usual lightweight parts in romantic comedy films. Bellamy seemed to recognize the importance of this role to his career because he viewed Jim McLeod as a multifaceted character whose successful portrayal would challenge him more than his other roles, especially his film roles in which he played many "amiable, dull, slightly ridiculous gentlemen who were invariably fated to lose Irene Dunne to Cary Grant." Wearing his director's hat, Kingsley found working with Bellamy a very satisfying experience, both professionally and personally.

The role of Mary McLeod was one of the few areas of disagreement among the critics, some of whom found the script to be the problem, and others simply recognizing that the role was intended to be a secondary one. Intended or not, the part is underwritten in comparison to the other major roles in the play. The audience sees only one side of Mary McLeod: the wife who has tried to make herself into the woman she thinks her husband wants. From Schneider and Giacoppetti, it hears of another, younger, perhaps carefree and careless Mary. But Mary is seen only in relation to others—the playwright does not develop her character through dialogue, and, unlike other characters in the play, she is not onstage enough to show the audience through action who she is.

Of all the actors in Detective Story, Meg Mundy as Mary McLeod fared the least well, receiving mixed reviews—one kinder critic citing her for "exciting moments," others contenting themselves with objective descriptions of her role rather than qualitative comments on her performance, and still others, with Ward Morehouse, finding her "never too convincing." George Jean Nathan tried to explain why this actress who, from all accounts, had been excellent in The Respectful Prostitute, had failed in a company whose performances were uniformly good. Basing his opinion on information received from an anonymous, reliable source, he wrote that Mundy had pretended during rehearsals to follow Kingsley's direction, but when performances began she "elected to forget it and to go it on her own," which "was not good enough."

Lee Grant as the Shoplifter, Horace McMahon as Lieutenant Monohan, Joseph Wiseman as the First Burglar (Charles Gennini), Michael Strong as the Second Burglar (Lewis Abbott), and James Maloney as Mr. Pritchett
all received outstanding notices for these roles, which they later re-created successfully in the film.

Regardless of their views on the play, the critics uniformly credited Kingsley with an excellent job of directing *Detective Story*. With a cast of thirty-four actors, many of whom were onstage at the same time, and a script with multiple dovetailing stories, the play had a potential for disaster if the stage movement and timing were less than precise. Richard Watts praised Kingsley as "one of the stage's most brilliant directors," specifically, as having "done a superb job in keeping his narrative moving with smoothness and dispatch." While criticizing Kingsley's writing style as "dated," Brooks Atkinson joined his fellow critics in finding much to praise in his directing: "[H]e has directed an honest performance that is always interesting and becomes exciting and shattering in the last act," and "Kingsley has organized a pungent and meticulous performance." 87

While following Kingsley's established patterns of extensive research and realistic staging, *Detective Story* differs from the playwright's earlier works. His underlying message about the dangers of a police state, while not entirely lost on the critics and audiences, was not so clearly and emphatically presented as were the statements in *Men in White*, *Dead End*, and *The Patriots* on abortion, the evils of slum life, and the nature of democracy, respectively. And critical and popular response to *Detective Story* was overwhelmingly to the exciting, action-packed stage, rather than to the message the action was intended to convey. Again, unlike the earlier plays whose messages either found specific audiences (health care professionals) or had a broad audience appeal (to all citizens regarding the problems of slum housing and juvenile delinquency; to all U.S. patriots during a war effort), *Detective Story* did not have that same kind of built-in constituency. Indeed, it is an irony that the police—the professional group responding to *Detective Story*—were, in fact, those who could have been most offended had the police state message been explicit.

*Darkness at Noon*

*Darkness at Noon*, while not Kingsley's first produced adaptation, preceded in 1939 by *The World We Make*, was certainly his most successful. Almost a dozen years had passed before Kingsley produced this second adaptation, which is based on the Arthur Koestler novel. Lester Markel, Sunday editor of the *New York Times*, suggested that the playwright read the novel, and Kingsley found that the work "crystallized [his] feeling of the Soviet experiment." 88 Markel also assisted Kingsley in establishing a correspondence with Koestler through which the right to adapt the novel into a play was ob-
Kingsley himself considered *Darkness at Noon* a companion piece to *The Patriots*: “I began examining the other side of the medal—the Soviet way, and I came upon *Darkness at Noon*. I really picked up where I left off with *The Patriots*.” In this stage adaptation, Kingsley creates a prison setting in which scenes from the imprisoned Rubashov’s Bolshevik past come back to him and in which he realizes that his torturer is the product of the cruel ideology of Rubashov’s own generation.

In a flamboyant gesture before the opening of the play, Koestler donated his earnings from the stage version of *Darkness at Noon* to the Fund for Intellectual Freedom, established by Graham Greene, John Dos Passos, James Farrell, Aldous Huxley, and Koestler. It seems likely that the novelist regretted this hasty display of generosity, since the play became a huge success. Koestler later attempted to obtain control over all foreign productions of the play. In an arbitration proceeding on Kingsley’s claim that Koestler had breached their contract by these and other demands, the arbitrator found in favor of Kingsley and disallowed Koestler’s claims.

Nevertheless, the collaboration was of importance to Koestler in his bid for permanent residency in the United States. Because of his previous communist activities, he was not eligible by law for such status. The major success of *Darkness at Noon* as a play, which made a definite anti-communist statement by Kingsley in contrast to the vagueness of the novel, at the time Koestler was applying for residency certainly had an effect. In spite of objections by the U.S. Justice Department, both the Senate and the House of Representatives passed a bill allowing Koestler to stay in the United States. Even though President Truman did not sign the bill, neither did he veto it; it therefore became law without his signature.

Coproduced by the Playwrights Company and May Kirshner, Kingsley’s sister, *Darkness at Noon* came at a critical time for the Playwrights Company, which was in a decline due, in part, to Kurt Weill’s death and to problems of the individual playwright members. John Wharton viewed this play as “an accompanying tiny gleam” in the company’s currently dark situation.

Opening in Philadelphia at the Forrest Theatre, *Darkness at Noon* received reviews that would set the tone for its run there, in New York, and on tour. Henry T. Murdock called it “a timely play, a useful play, a thoughtful play and, since these things are not always enough in the theater—it is a profoundly gripping play.” The majority of the critics in New York agreed and gave raves; disagreement came from a small minority. Richard Watts described the play: “Brilliantly staged by Mr. Kingsley, with Claude Rains giving the portrayal of his career in an enormously exacting role, and fine supporting cast playing with unfailing skill, *Darkness at Noon* emerges as a
drama of great emotional and intellectual impact that never falls into the
easy primrose path of conventional anti-Kremlin hysteria.” John Chapman
called the play “the only contemporary and contemporarily important
drama we have on the stage.”96 These writers were joined in their praise-
singing by Howard Barnes, William Hawkins, John McClain, Robert Cole-
man, Whitney Bolton, Ward Morehouse, and others.

Indeed, the play was regarded widely as so fine that it might be a Pulitzer
Prize contender, and there was much speculation regarding its chances. Iron-
ically, it is likely that the Pulitzer Prize revision regarding an American topic,
instituted in 1934 following the public discussion and criticism regarding
the committee’s award to Kingsley’s Men in White over Maxwell Anderson’s
Mary of Scotland, put Darkness at Noon out of the running. In any event,
no Pulitzer play award was given in 1951.

Brooks Atkinson gave the play a somewhat negative review, comparing
it unfavorably with the novel: “Somewhere between the novel and the theatre
the intellectual distinction has gone out of the work.” In contrast, William
Hawkins wrote that Kingsley had “done an amazing job . . . of dramatizing
what must at first have seemed the undramatizable.” John Chapman (who
admitted that he had been unable to get through the novel) felt that Kingsley
had “taken an involved novel filled with the literary tricks of the fictioneer
and [had] made it into a grim and frightening work for the stage.” Elliot
Norton gave Kingsley high marks for his adaptation of Koestler’s ideas to
the stage, since “philosophical notions are not truly dramatic.” Max Lerner
gave a good review, with some reservations: “His [Kingsley’s] forte has al-
ways been that he is a kind of seismograph to register the convulsions of his
era. He has set down here with a deep seriousness the consciousness and
conscience of an anti-Communist generation.” But even in his recognition of
Kingsley’s presentation of a broadly based public sentiment through his writ-
ing, Lerner felt that the playwright had focused on the political issues and,
in doing so, had “almost by-passed the darkness of the human heart.” One
of the very few truly negative theatre reviews was by Hobe Morrison of
Variety, who predicted “slight boxoffice prospects,” a prediction quickly dis-
proved by both critical and popular viewers.97

The most negative, vitriolic, and extended commentary, however, was the
New York Daily Worker’s review by Bob Lauter, who had also found Detective
Story’s statement on the police state to be a little too close to home.
Furious with both Koestler for writing Darkness at Noon and Kingsley for
adapting it to the stage, Lauter loosed a scathing diatribe on the two men
and their work, the “corruption and decadence of the Broadway stage,” and
the Hearst publication empire. The review is so remarkable that excerpts
can hardly demonstrate its outrageousness:
The Alvin Theatre is now offering a spectacle, a rather dull and pompous spectacle, but a dangerous one: the spectacle of two minds [Koestler's and Kingsley's] completely stripped of all integrity. . . . Its [the play's] current purposes are clear. They are first, to contribute to the lowest level of anti-Soviet hysteria—the Hearst level. Second, to equate fascism and Communism. Third, to present the theory that the Soviet Union invents non-existent spies and saboteurs. . . . Fourth, and perhaps most important, *Darkness at Noon* is an attempt to justify the sniveling cowardice, the colossal duplicity, and the utter moral bankruptcy of Koestler's heroes: the Trotskyite criminals. . . .

Kingsley, Koestler, and Broadway made no reply, but Hearst had both the means and the will to respond. Howard Rushmore, writing for the *New York Journal American*, retaliated by citing the *Daily Worker*'s review as the "best proof that the play is a damaging and effective indictment of communism." Lauter replied by criticizing Rushmore "of the Hearst press—a press which is notorious throughout the world for its gutter journalism and cheap sensationalism," for his championing of the play. Indeed, in the salvos fired by two diametrically opposed ideologies, Kingsley and the play almost became lost as the discussion veered into an arena not usually frequented by theatre issues.

Speculation began as early as the spring of 1950 that film star Claude Rains would play the lead role in *Darkness at Noon*, which was indeed the case. While it was a most successful role for him, it was also a difficult transition from film to the stage, according to Kingsley. And perhaps there was more behind Rains's attitude than nervousness in returning to the stage: Kingsley felt at the time that communists had "even worked on Claude Rains in California, trying to frighten him, and telling him if he appeared in it it would ruin his career." Yet it was certainly a successful undertaking. Many critics joined Richard Watts in praising Rains's portrayal of the Communist Rubashov. John Chapman called his performance "remarkable physically . . . [and] even more notable intellectually."

Alexander Scourby received excellent notices in his role as Rubashov's comrade and sometime friend Ivanoff, while newcomer Walter J. Palance (Jack Palance of later film and television fame) was praised for his "chillingly wonderful performance as Gletkin." Kim Hunter as Luba received generally good reviews. Although several critics were not overly enthusiastic, others found her work pleasing, including Robert Coleman who felt that she had "add[ed] another fine page to her biography with a forthright and tender portrayal." Kingsley and Frederick Fox also were praised in their capacities as director and designer.

In February 1951 Jack Gould wrote a *New York Times* article on a current necessity "in broadcasting [that] is the program which deals effectively
and maturely with the evils of communism." Using Kingsley's *Darkness at Noon* and Robert E. Sherwood's *There Shall Be No Night* as examples, Gould pointed out that "the fate of a single individual or family can be a far more eloquent editorial than even the most impassioned preaching on the Soviet menace." A week later, Walter Winchell announced that *Darkness at Noon* was to become a Voice of America broadcast. In addition, it would have the distinction of having all regular programs canceled for its broadcast, something previously done only for major speeches by the president of the United States. The anticipated audience for this broadcast was estimated at 100,000,000 listeners in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, Latin America, and the Far East.

In an effort to reach an even broader audience in the United States "because of the topical immediacy of the anti-Communist theme," Kingsley and the Playwrights Company decided to release *Darkness at Noon* to colleges simultaneously with the Broadway production. This new idea in play production foreshadowed by more than a decade the American Playwrights Theatre, founded in 1963, whose purpose was to provide first-run plays by established playwrights to college, university, regional, and community theatres.

*Darkness at Noon* followed the pattern established by Kingsley's earlier works and took its place in the broader context of discussion on politics, communism, human rights, and betrayal of one's country. The *New York Socialist Call*, in decrying the dismal working conditions in Russian mines as described by recent refugees, felt that Kingsley had allowed his "stagecraft to obscure rather thoroughly the intellectual content of the novel." *Darkness at Noon*, both play and novel, were cited as providing needed answers in a consideration of Alger Hiss's guilt and motivation for his actions. The play was discussed as revealing "the Soviet mentality" in an article on the support of unions for the U.S. administration's foreign policy, in particular, that for Russia. The unions also provided the unusual theatre audience that Kingsley's plays tended to draw with "a dozen New York unions [buying] more than 10,000 seats." An American businessman, after seventeen months in a Budapest prison on espionage charges, compared his life there to prison life in *Darkness at Noon*: "I didn't have much else to do but listen to the sound of footsteps." Even entertainment columnist Earl Wilson compared the torture endured by a Hungarian political prisoner to that of Rubashov.

**Conclusion**

In examining the negative criticism of Kingsley's plays, one finds some common threads: criticism of his treatment of personal relationships and of
weak or inadequately developed romantic subplots; criticism of underdeveloped female roles; criticism of his dated method, whether called naturalism, realism, or journalistic style; criticism of his dialogue for not reaching the heights of poetry. And yet even stronger threads weave these plays inextricably into the fabric of twentieth-century American theatre—their meticulous, depressing, frightening, gut-wrenching, and inspiring realism; roles of great breadth for actors; masterfully constructed scripts that in combination with outstanding design and direction provided first-rate theatrical presentations; and, perhaps most importantly, an unswerving attention to grave human issues.

Even though the responses of society to particular concerns have differed from decade to decade, those human issues are in many ways unchanging. A Western Hospital Review article cited deficiencies in health care, an issue weighing heavily on Americans in the 1990s: “many persons either cannot and do not receive the care they need, or are heavily burdened by the costs, . . . the poorer the family, the less medical care it received.”\(^{116}\) That article was published in 1934 and included a very positive review of Men in White.

The inadequacies of housing and schools for inner-city children, those children’s association with gangs, their use of weapons for protection or power, and the frequently tragic outcomes for them are a part of current American society. While neither contributing factors nor solutions to these problems are the same as those for 1935, Dead End continues to speak to the hopelessness of such situations for individuals and society alike.

With the balance of political power changing on an almost daily basis throughout the world, a reconsideration of the nature of a democracy such as The Patriots’s is again appropriate. Kingsley would approve because he believes, as he learned from Thomas Jefferson, that “a democracy must always be working out its destiny.”\(^{117}\)

The abuse of power by the individual is an issue as old as humankind, and certainly the abuse of power by police is an ongoing problem as well. A most prominent recent example would be the internationally followed Rodney King case, but certainly corollaries could be drawn to such governments as that of pre-Mandela South Africa. To the extent that audiences perceive Kingsley’s message regarding the police state, Detective Story remains timely.

Given the recent changes in formerly communist countries, Darkness at Noon would seem to be the most dated of Kingsley’s work, in the same way that free-world-versus-communist spy thrillers are no longer current. U.S. anticommunist sentiment has waned since the play and novel were written. Nevertheless, attempts to control thought and expression are not unique to communism, but are possible in many forms of government.

In all of his plays, Kingsley’s style of writing for the theatre dates his
work more than do the issues he confronts in that writing. But while realism
or a journalistic style may not now be in vogue in the theatre, it is still in use
not only by numerous fiction writers, many of whom deal with the same
topics introduced to the stage by Kingsley, but also on television in news
coverage, documentaries, pseudodocumentaries, soap operas, and dramatic
series.

We live in a time in which the specter of illegal abortion has again been
raised and the inadequacy of the health-care system is a daily topic, in which
children facing hopelessness and poverty stare at us on the evening news, in
which police brutality cases are before the courts, and in which issues of
individual patriotism and the position of the United States as a democracy
in a rapidly changing world arise. And in this time in which some form of
all the human rights issues and social problems dealt with in these plays are
still, or again, with us, Sidney Kingsley has proven to be a playwright whose
work is timely as well as timeless.

NOTES

2. Sidney Kingsley, “The Professor and the Critic” (Address delivered at Cornell University for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Cornell Dramatic Club, 7 March 1959), 2.
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21. Ibid.


27. Letter from E. H. L. Corwin (Director, United Hospital Fund of New York, Hospital Information and Service Bureau) to Sidney Kingsley, 14 October 1933.


40. Mantle, “*Dead End*: As Alive as Steam”; Gilbert W. Gabriel, “*Dead End*: A Brave Show Bravely Done: Riverfront Drama Is Rasping Realism,” *New York American*, 10 November [1935].

41. Atkinson, “Kingsley’s *Dead End*.”

42. Mantle, “*Dead End*: As Alive as Steam.”


44. *Public Housing Progress*, 15 December [1935].


46. *Summary of Hearings on the Wagner Housing Bill before the Committee on*


52. Wharton, Life among the Playwrights, 121.


54. Wharton, Life among the Playwrights, 121.


61. Congressional Record, vol. 89, no. 68, 13 April 1943.


63. Wharton, Life among the Playwrights, 122.


69. Sidney Kingsley, Detective Story, Act III.

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73. “Detective Story,” [Variety], 26 September 1951.


78. Watts, “Kingsley’s Police Play.”


84. See Watts, “Kingsley’s Police Play”; Gibbs, “Cops and Causes.”


88. Sidney Kingsley, private notes.

89. Ibid.


93. “Senate Votes DP Extension, Backs Koestler Stay in U.S.,” Washington Post,
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22 June 1951; and “House OKs Koestler Stay in America,” Minneapolis Star, 8 September 1951.


95. Wharton, Life among the Playwrights, 193.


101. “Darkness at Noon on VOA.”

102. Chapman, “Darkness at Noon Is a Powerful.”


105. Coleman, “Darkness at Noon Points a Moral.”


110. New York Socialist Call, 26 January 1951.


113. Ibid.


116. “What the Public Is Thinking,” Western Hospital Review (January 1934):