

Interview (Written): Tony Kushner

[Scott Myers](#)

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A conversation with the writer who wrote the latest adaptation of the musical *West Side Story*.



Ansel Elgort and Rachel Zegler in *West Side Story* (2021)

I believe that *West Side Story* is the third collaboration between Steven Spielberg and Pulitzer-award winning writer Tony Kushner. The other two films: *Munich* (2005) and *Lincoln* (2012). There are two more in the works: *The Fabelmans* and *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara*.

Here are some excerpts from a Hollywood Reporter interview with Kushner in which he talks about working on *West Side Story*.

What were your initial thoughts when you heard Steven Spielberg wanted to remake *West Side Story*?

The first time I heard about it was when Steven and I had breakfast in New York around 2016. He said, "I have a project that I'd like to propose." And he said he wanted to do *West Side Story*. And my first thought was, "You're out of your mind." And I came home and told [my husband, author] Mark [Harris]. I said, "Steven wants to redo *West Side Story*. I can't think of anything harder, and I hope he drops it." But he didn't drop it. He kept bringing it up and talking about it. And I got very excited by some of the things he was telling me.

Like what?

Steven has a real knack for figuring out where the fault lines in society are, what's in the zeitgeist right now, what are people concerned about. And the inclusiveness that is at the heart of the American democratic experiment and willingness to expand the franchise and the enormous importance of multiculturalism to the American democratic experiment — these are all really near and dear to Steven's heart and to mine.

The source material, *Romeo and Juliet*, is about hatred between two groups that are sort of two sides of the same coin. Nobody even knows why the Capulets and the Montagues hate each other. That's given a misimpression about *West Side Story*, which is that the Jets and the

Sharks are the Capulets and the Montagues. They're not. The creators believed very deeply that race hatred and bigotry and oppression and discrimination are profoundly malevolent aberrations and can lead to cataclysmic consequences. And I think that is the tragedy of *West Side Story*. It is an anti-racist, democratic musical.

Here is a behind the scenes featurette where Spielberg shares his longstanding passion to remake the movie:

Website: [West Side Story](#)

For the rest of the Hollywood Reporter interview with Tony Kushner, go [here](#).

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