

The Troubled American Dream



Theatre critics and scholars love to debate what plays and playwrights are the “greatest.” On most every list of greats, Arthur Miller takes a top spot. Our own *Denver Post* lists his *Death of a Salesman* as number one of the ten most important American plays, and two of Miller’s plays make the *New Yorker* list of “50 Greatest Plays of the Last 100 Years.” However, *All My Sons* rarely makes these lists, and I think that’s a huge oversight. *Death of a Salesman* is a flashier play, and *A View from the Bridge* is sexier, but, for my money, *All My Sons* is his most American, most honest and most perfect play.

Americans love a success story. A self-made man who overcomes the odds to create a successful business is the essence of the American Dream. And when Arthur Miller wrote *All My Sons*, in the glow of post-World War II victory, these sentiments were even more deeply felt than they are today. So, it took some real courage for the then unknown Miller to explore the dark side of this American Dream.

He creates, in the play’s central character, Joe Keller, a quintessential American—a man from the middle of America who survived the Great Depression. He is a man from the lower class with little formal education who becomes the owner of a successful business. He made his way up the ladder through hard work and strong instincts for making money.

And he does all of this for his family, for his sons. Another part of the American Dream is that our children will do better than we did, that we’ll pass our life’s work into their grateful hands. But in order to keep this dream alive, Keller makes an unforgivable decision. While it appears that he’s avoided the consequences of this decision, in the single day of the play, his world falls apart and the American Dream becomes a nightmare his family will have to live with for the rest of their lives.

In a play that has echoes of Greek tragedy, Miller shines a harsh light on many of America’s most cherished institution—capitalism, the military, the family, industry—and asks us to consider what we owe the world and the people beyond our own walls. Keller argues that his bad deeds are justified because he did them for his sons and that many other men have done much worse. But his son, Chris, who watched young men die in the war, can’t forgive him. “I know you’re no worse than most men but I thought you were better.”

Businesses and their leaders that harm others for the sake of profits were hardly new when Miller wrote this play, and Bernard Madoff, the many financial institutions who cooked their books in the 2008 economic crisis, the BP oil spill and countless other examples make it clear that profit at the expense of responsibility to all our sons and daughters is still alive in the shadows of today’s American Dream.

January 29 is the 70th anniversary of the first performance of *All My Sons*, and I’m so proud to celebrate it with you. Its characters feel like people we know, its conclusion is devastating, and its questions remain as current today as on the snowy night in 1947 when it opened on Broadway.

LYNNE COLLINS

*Director, All My Sons,
Arvada Center Artistic Director of Plays*

ALL MY SONS MARCH 2 – MAY 3

BLACK BOX THEATRE

Tickets: Starting at \$45 (Previews \$25)

Genre: American Classic, Drama

Content: Best Enjoyed by Young Adults & Up

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