

Spider Man

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According to John Patrick Shanley, author of the play *Doubt*, Americans are “living in a courtroom culture” (Preface to *Doubt*), yet he does offer a solution to this crisis: people can choose to be “responsible, thinking people [who] do not...reduce complicated subjects down to ‘for’ or ‘against’” (“Meanwhile: I am”). In the preface of his play, Shanley concludes that a typical courtroom is a microcosm of American society, where Americans “advocate,” judge, and ultimately find themselves in contentious debates where they feel they must determine a definitive “verdict.” Winning an argument appears to be the goal; every discussion has become “a contest of wills,” (Shanley, Preface to *Doubt*) and learning and exploring a topic has become less important than being right. Shanley surmises that a person will argue anything, even if he does not fully believe what he is saying because he is afraid that perhaps “[he] [doesn’t] know...anything” (Preface to *Doubt*). In other words, people fear uncertainty and doubt to the point where they will cling to a belief, just so they can feel the security of clarity. However, in his article “Meanwhile: I am, therefore I doubt,” Shanley claims a person does not have to force himself to choose a side, especially when the situation involves a controversial, complicated topic, such as the War in Iraq or abortion. Instead, Americans should stop trying to simplify the complicated because they are afraid of certainty, and evolve into “responsible, thinking people” (Shanley, “Meanwhile: I am”) who understand that sometimes there is no black and white answer.

I certainly appreciate Shanley’s view that America has become a “courtroom culture” (Preface to *Doubt*) because I — without question — have been victim to its claws. As a little girl, I *had* to be right, even if I didn’t fully believe what I was saying. I would correct my mother’s grammar, argue with my father over a trip we remembered differently, and retell any story the way I believed it should be told so the ending included me winning in some way. I didn’t do any of these things to improve my mother’s awareness of grammar, help my father remember a memory, or entertain the people who were listening to my story; I just wanted to be right, to feel superior and safe. I remember arguing with my mother about *Star Wars* and its release year. Hilariously, I tried to suggest that the movie was released in 1985. After

my mother argued that the movie was released in 1977, I started to realize I was wrong, but I kept going because I didn't want to admit defeat; I couldn't admit I was wrong, so I actually ran up to the computer and googled the date, still hoping that this would all end in my favor, despite knowing I was wrong.

When I accepted defeat, I actually felt embarrassed because I was wrong about a release date, which is evidence enough that Shanley understands how badly people, including me, need to be right, even about topics that are completely meaningless and silly.