

## Trading “Earnest Drama” for Prophecy: Performing Japanese American Internment After 9/11

Emily Colborn-Roxworthy

Whether it sullies the endeavor or not, none of us are strangers to the savvy marketing move that contrives to frame our academic and theatrical work as crucially relevant to the contemporary world. For instance, when I explain my historical research about the evacuation and internment of Japanese Americans following the attack on Pearl Harbor, more often than not my audience sighs and remarks at how “relevant” my work must be in light of recent events. They mean 9/11 and the rapid encroachment upon civil liberties that followed the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. And while I always bristle at what seems an opportunistic masquerade—the many differences in domestic race and international relations that span the gap between 1941 and 2001 catch in my throat—I cannot deny that the perceived isomorphism between Pearl Harbor and 9/11 (and between Japanese Americans then and Muslim and Arab Americans now) confers privileged status upon my particular project. Like most gifts, this unsought attention carries the potential for danger.

By the same token, whether they like it or not, many contemporary playwrights have found their work thrust into the spotlight cast by the 9/11 tragedy, even when the dramas in question were composed or conceived well before the terrorist attacks. “It must be very frustrating for a writer to work for years on a play that is so rich in so many ways, and then have the overlay of current events make its focus seem so limited,” actor and Steppenwolf Theatre artistic director Martha Lavey said about a 2002 production of Tony Kushner’s *Homebody/Kabul*, in which she starred. But while celebrated playwrights like Tony Kushner and powerful artists like Martha Lavey may find the attention cast by the post-9/11 spotlight to be unwanted and even detrimental to the integrity of their work, some historically marginalized segments of the American theatre have found such thematic overlap to be financially and aesthetically vital. In particular, in the last few years, the 35-year-old Asian American theatre project of dramatizing the internment camp experience<sup>1</sup> has undergone a major resurgence and has garnered new attention from critics and audiences who had earlier found such a project to be staid or, at

---

Emily Colborn-Roxworthy is on the Ph.D. faculty of the University of California at San Diego’s Department of Theatre and Dance where she teaches Asian American theatre and related courses. Her current book project is titled “The Theatre of Japanese American Trauma: Racial Performativity in World War II.” Her research has appeared in *TDR*, *Theatre Research International*, and *New England Theatre Journal*.

best, unfashionably “earnest drama.”<sup>2</sup> Pointing out the prophetic “resonance” of camp plays<sup>3</sup> in the post-9/11 world is by now a tried-and-true marketing tool that can be counted on to drive ticket sales and media attention.<sup>4</sup> But even without this publicity framing, many audiences to post-9/11 productions of camp plays find this contemporary “resonance” to be the most remarkable feature of the theatrical experience, as demonstrated by reviews and post-show discussions with the creative team (“talkbacks”). In short, in the era of the USA Patriot Act and atrocities against Arab prisoners at Guantanamo Bay, performances of camp plays have become occasions understood—by many but not all constituents of the theatrical experience—as resistant political acts against a government threatening if not already proceeding to repeat past mistakes.

However, in this essay I will demonstrate that this activist frame has been imposed upon recent dramatists of the internment despite their avowed intentions and, more importantly, contrary to the actual politics of these pieces, which have not only rapidly proliferated but have also undergone a stark aesthetic transformation since 9/11. I argue that these new camp plays are indeed a product of the post-9/11 cultural moment and do mark a significant departure from the 35-year history of professionally produced, predominantly realist camp plays, but that many of these new plays actually advance a depoliticized, mythologized vision of U.S. race relations that naturalizes the internment and renders innocent the actions of the white wartime captors of West Coast Japanese Americans. In several of these plays, including the two I will focus on here, this depoliticized, mythic vision has been advanced through a deceptively simple dramaturgical strategy: telling the internment story through the eyes of a child protagonist. Namely, Dan Taguchi and Rus McCoy’s musical *Manzanar: Story of an American Family* stages an actual internment camp (California’s Manzanar War Relocation Center) through the eyes of twelve-year-old Nisei Margaret Shimada, while Naomi Iizuka’s youth theatre adaptation *Citizen 13559* presents a fictionalized Wisconsin camp called Mirror Lake by staging the wartime journals of twelve-year-old Nisei Ben Uchida.<sup>5</sup>

Many observers of the American theatre have noted what London journalist Ian Johns called the “oblique distance” from which recent playwrights locate themselves in relation to 9/11. Made two years after the terrorist attacks, Johns’s assessment of this new American theatre of indirection is worth quoting at length:

What’s telling, though, about America’s post-9/11 plays is the way they address the event from an oblique distance, as if it remains dauntingly incomprehensible. [Craig Wright’s] *Recent Tragic Events* is an absurdist romantic comedy set in Minneapolis, not New York. The monologues in [Jonathan Bell’s] *Portraits* are framed by an artist struggling to create 9/11’s *Guernica*. Gersten-Vassilaros says that *Omnium Gatherum* is “a play about

questions, not September 11". [Neil] LaBute regards *The Mercy Seat* as "a play about relationships, not 9/11". Perhaps that's simply the American dramatists' way. Think of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, which tackled the McCarthy witch-hunts in the guise of the Salem witch trials, or even this year's *Dirty Story* by John Patrick Shanley, which dealt with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as represented by a dysfunctional romantic relationship. Maybe this current theatre of the unnerved simply needs more time to tackle 9/11 head on.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of post-9/11 camp plays, this "oblique distance" is achieved in a related but different manner: both Naomi Iizuka and the team of Dan Taguchi and Rus McCoy are on the record distancing themselves from any interpretation of their camp plays as intentionally in dialogue with "recent tragic events." Iizuka bristles at the idea that Pearl Harbor and the 9/11 terrorists attacks, as well as the treatment of Americans of color in their aftermaths, would be conflated through theatre. Despite being one of the bewildered air travelers on the morning of the attacks and one of the Japanese American<sup>7</sup> writers whose camp plays have been produced since that day, Iizuka denies that a parallel operates in her life or her work. "I think it is also important to be rigorous about the specific differences," she told me, emphasizing that "there's a danger in drawing too close parallels"—endangering a deep understanding of either event.<sup>8</sup> In a New York *Times* article about *Manzanar*, staff writer Jonathan Glater acknowledges that Taguchi and McCoy "said they had not set out to tell a cautionary tale for our time, as fears of terrorism drive discussions of ethnic profiling and detention of Arab-Americans." But Glater also adds that Taguchi and McCoy "readily acknowledged that the musical they wrote is unexpectedly relevant." McCoy is quoted as saying, "That's all coincidence, that in a sense history has come back on itself and made it very topical [...] When you come right down to it, if you wait long enough, another war is going to happen, and another group of people is going to get persecuted."<sup>9</sup>

Theatre scholar Marvin Carlson models many of the critical tendencies that have naturalized the interpretation of recent camp plays as resonant with post-9/11 politics in his fine survey of how the New York City theatre scene has responded to the War on Terror. Carlson includes in his analysis plays that hold 9/11 at an oblique distance as well as plays written well before September 2001, praising some of these dramas as "prescient" of events that postdate them. Carlson proclaims, for instance, that Deborah Breevort's *The Women of Lockerbie* (which treats the 1988 terrorist bombing of a Pan American flight over Lockerbie, Scotland) was "created before the events of 9/11, but it proved thematically even more prescient of the emotional stresses and political questions occurring in the wake of those events than the similarly prophetic [Kushner play] *Homebody/Kabul*."<sup>10</sup> Carlson

also celebrates the recent American embrace of the “common European practice of using revivals of classic works to make contemporary political statements” which, prior to 9/11, was “rarely encountered in America, but in the politically charged climate of the war in Iraq, this also underwent some change.” He highlights the National Asian American Theatre Company’s March 2003 revival of Archibald MacLeish’s 1938 radio play *Air Raid*, a production that featured a mainly Asian American cast. Carlson notes the resonance of *Air Raid* to those first days of the Iraq war because this “play expressed, in the period before World War II, America’s concern with the rise of fascism in Europe.”<sup>11</sup> As theatre critics like Carlson and Ian Johns have groped toward a definition of American post-9/11 political theatre, they have created an expectation that dramas addressing the fallout of the terrorist attacks will be recognized through their indirect but “prescient” tone and timing, and might also speak through earlier but structurally similar historical events. In short, these expectations have virtually guaranteed that all camp plays performed after 9/11 will be (mis)perceived as political theatre activated in resistance to the War on Terror.

Audience reception is another site for the imposition of parallels between camp plays and present politics, as awkwardly demonstrated by a recent talkback following a performance of *Manzanar: Story of an American Family* in Los Angeles. The full-scale musical *Manzanar* has been a labor of love for Taguchi and McCoy since the early 1990s, and, under the aegis of Los Angeles Asian American theatre company East West Players, has spawned a 45-minute educational version performed at schools and community centers throughout the area since 2002. Both versions of the musical follow the fictional Shimada family from their San Pedro home as they are evacuated to the Santa Anita Racetrack assembly center and on to internment at Manzanar; the protagonist is the Shimada’s twelve-year-old daughter Margaret. The play is structured through Margaret’s reworking of her prewar dreams—of being a big-band singer—within the constraints of the camp. The talkback with the touring production cast, along with their director Mike Hagiwara, creators McCoy and Taguchi, and East West Players producing artistic director Tim Dang followed a showcase of the 45-minute school version on the occasion of Manzanar Family Day at the Union Center for the Arts on May 14, 2005. This offering was part of East West Players’ celebration of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month (observed each May in the U.S.). The audience mainly consisted of two constituencies, who together represent the usual audiences for both the touring and full-length productions of *Manzanar*: families with school-age children of various ethnicities and senior citizens of Japanese descent who had been interned at camps including Manzanar. The May 14 performance provoked an intensely emotional reaction on the part of the audience despite the rough production values and uneven talents of the touring cast; during most of the show, I was surrounded by sniffles and even outright sobs as the powerful ballads and chillingly harmonized

vocals washed over the crowd. Musical numbers like “Unraveling,” which marks the Shimada family’s realization that they will indeed be interned despite their allegiance to the U.S., used a staccato piano solo as the backbone for a disjointed but overlapping duet sung by father and daughter facing out:

MARGARET: Daddy, nightmares wake me up at night

TOYO: Don’t you worry, my little one

MARGARET: There are monsters underneath my bed

TOYO: Home is in our hearts

MARGARET: They say they’re going to take me far away

TOYO: And we’re not going anywhere . . .

MARGARET: Daddy, will they make us leave our home?

TOYO: This is your country, my little one

MARGARET: Daddy, tell me where else would we go?

Daddy, must I leave my things behind?

TOYO: You were born here, it’s all you’ve ever known

MARGARET: Daddy, why are others so unkind? Daddy,  
promise me that you will be there

TOYO: This is your country, my little one

MARGARET: Promise me that you won’t leave me alone, tell  
me everything will be alright

TOYO: Don’t let them tell you otherwise . . .

CHORUS: Unraveling . . .

TOYO: They can never take away the truth

Truth is written deep inside your heart

They can never take away the truth

Truth has always been there from the start

*Two gray-suited F.B.I. agents enter. They flash their badges  
and take Toyo away.*<sup>12</sup>

The emotional force of “Unraveling” and other *Manzanar* musical numbers sung with utter conviction and largely skilled technical execution garnered tears during the performance but a very different reaction during the talkback. With few exceptions, nearly every audience member who spoke<sup>13</sup> questioned the creative team about the parallels to the current U.S. treatment of Arab Americans, despite the authors’ withdrawal of their intentions from this project and despite the increasing, and increasingly palpable, annoyance of the cast, whose specific contributions in terms of embodying internees onstage was utterly disavowed by the conversation that followed the show. When asked how student audiences received *Manzanar* “given current events,” Hagiwara reluctantly admitted that Arab American students seemed most connected to the play, especially because teachers drew parallels

between then and now in preparing the classes for the performance. Taguchi asserted that when his play was performed at the Hamilton Academy of Music, where he is on faculty, the prevailing reaction was one of shock in the realization that such events had transpired during World War II; he stated that the “great joy” of creating the musical was found in informing people about the internment experience and honoring former internees who find their way into the audience at public performances of *Manzanar*.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, McCoy answered one audience member’s question about contemporary parallels by stating, “Dan [Taguchi] approached me [to collaborate on the musical] ten years ago, long before 9/11,” and later attempted to turn the audience’s attention away from any contemporary political relevance of the play, instead focusing on the emotional core of *Manzanar*. Building on an earlier comment of actress Helen Ota (Aunt Fumiko) that *Manzanar* is simply “a very human story [with] a lot of emotions and such . . . you can’t help but feel for the family,” McCoy went on to argue the efficacy of their musical centers on getting audiences “to feel again.” He cited theatre’s generic ability to snap Americans out of their apathy and posited that *Manzanar* makes American audiences feel “we are better people than this,” empathetically aligning themselves with the internees and recoiling from the racism and persecution exercised by the “monsters” lurking beneath Margaret’s bed and the “they” that Margaret anxiously sings of in “Unraveling.”

*Manzanar* thus carries a moral and emotional force akin to melodrama (as most American musical theatre, and much post-9/11 theatre generally, does) while lacking the pointedly anti-hegemonic bend typically associated with political theatre.<sup>15</sup> The oppressors and aggressors portrayed in McCoy and Taguchi’s musical are not specific incarnations of U.S. political power; rather, their world-wrenching power emanates either from below—as the “monsters underneath [Margaret’s] bed” suggest—or from above, as another moving ballad, a solo titled “God Took a Photograph” demonstrates. In performance, this song literally gave me shivers up and down my spine. “God Took a Photograph” portrays a child’s comprehension of the incomprehensible U.S. atomic bombings of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, using a divine logic that is analogous to the childish explanation of thunder as “God bowling in heaven.” The song opens with these lines:

MARGARET: In August 1945, God took a photograph  
 And when he did, it made a flash  
 That lit the Asian sky  
 80,000 people posed when God took his photograph  
 Though they never had the time to smile  
 Or even question why  
 Few had realized at the time  
 That something so horribly divine had happened  
 That caused the world to change<sup>16</sup>

The song communicates the scale of the atrocity in Hiroshima and Nagasaki—sending shivers through the audience—but also renders innocent the atrocities by likening vaporized Japanese people to “[God’s] pretty little photographs.” What might read as irony or bitterness on the page is nowhere apparent in performance, as a very sweet actress (Kristina Reyes) sings with the naive Margaret’s awed bewilderment. U.S. President Harry Truman, who infamously ordered the atomic bombings to force Japan to surrender, is mentioned only briefly near the end of the song: “And when news had spread, the world stood still / Truman smiled and sealed the deal / And, one by one, the soldiers did disarm / Was this in God’s master plan / And did it have to be Japan? / Must the cost of peace be paid with so much harm?”<sup>17</sup> While these lines clearly belong to an innocent child, they also represent the conscience and worldview of *Manzanar* as a whole. Throughout the musical, specific policy decisions and persecutions are relegated to small moments of exposition, often voiced by a (presumably white) radio announcer or performed by faceless perpetrators like the masked opportunists who descend, vulture-like, on the Shimada’s property prior to evacuation in the musical number “Oh, What a Bargain!”

In her analysis of *Dogeaters* (Jessica Hagedorn’s semiautobiographical novel depicting the Philippines under the Marcos regime), Debra Werrlein argues that the novel’s adolescent protagonist Rio reinscribes the infantilizing colonial discourse (“Manifest Destiny”) of the U.S. toward the Philippines through her own depoliticized enthrallment with imported Hollywood images. Werrlein suggests that Rio’s blissful obliviousness of U.S. politics (even once she immigrates to the States) combined with her uncritical consumption of U.S. culture metonymically portrays the infantilized postcolonial condition of many Filipinos. Werrlein does not go so far as to suggest that by organizing the world through a child’s eyes *Dogeaters* lets U.S. power off the hook, but she does question the “counterhegemonic potential” of Hagedorn’s promotion of Rio to the starring role in her novel.<sup>18</sup> According to Werrlein, Rio and her adolescent cohort in the novel actually “serve American hegemony by unwittingly reinscribing its discourses of innocence.”<sup>19</sup> Margaret’s innocence in *Manzanar* serves a very similar hegemonic purpose, both in her transference of the U.S. role in World War II atrocities to otherworldly forces and in her unquestioned faith in the American Dream and its cultural products. The musical opens, for instance, with Margaret singing, a hobby she later explains, in the song “When Singing,” as her means of combating the silencing and invisibility she experiences as a young girl: “Girls are made to feel so small / As if we have no thoughts at all / We try to fly, they clip a wing / But they won’t ignore me when I sing / I’ll keep singing [refrain].” When the song is reprised at the end of the play, Margaret’s character development is expressed through her refusal to remain silent about her internment experience; she defiantly sings, “They say, ‘Forget and fade away’ / But I won’t be silent, I’ll have my say / And if no one is listening / They’ll

pay attention when I sing / So I'll keep singing [refrain]." The musical's coda shows Margaret in her 70s, returning to the Manzanar historical site to perform for visitors to the camp's "Memorial of the Dead" monument. She has transcended her wartime internment to become "famed opera singer Margaret Hayashi," enacting her mother's prewar dream of putting Margaret "on a stage / Singing 'Cho Cho San' [in Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly*] with all her heart."<sup>20</sup> Aside from the problematics of aspiring to star in the über-Orientalist role of *Madame Butterfly*, the fact that Margaret indeed lives out her immigrant (Issei) mother's American Dream, and does so by ascending the hierarchy of Western high culture to attain the status of "famed opera singer," suggests a faith in the terms of U.S. politics and culture rather than resistance to them.

Moreover, while the ostensible aesthetic purpose of the musical *Manzanar*, according to East West Players program materials and their website, is that it "personalizes the experiences of upheaval and discrimination that Japanese Americans endured in the U.S. during World War II"—an emotional experience in line with melodrama—it actually *depersonalizes* the political machinations leading to internment, ascribing these choices to divine logic and monstrous forces. Taguchi and McCoy insist they were driven by historical accuracy in creating their musical, which was inspired in large part by Taguchi's mother's experience of being interned at Manzanar at age nine. The device of looking at internment through the eyes of a child dictated a very particular representation of camp life, as McCoy explains:

When we interviewed Dan's mother . . . she said she sang in the camp. She told us when she was nine years old, she smoked and played "pea knuckle." We found that very interesting. We based the story on a mother-daughter relationship and how their family falls apart. At the same time, we also give little snippets of what happens around the camp—the baseball games they use to play and going to the gymnasium to see movies—so people who come and see this play and were in the camps will say, "This happened to me."<sup>21</sup>

Although McCoy and Taguchi set out to accurately represent Taguchi's mother's story in order to "personalize" the internment, the selection of a juvenile protagonist, combined with the tonal demands of musical theatre, have yielded a "crowd-pleasing" camp play. The question, of course, becomes which crowd *Manzanar* actually affirms. An elderly Nisei audience—one that has lived through various interpretations of their wartime internment as they pass through a lifetime cycle from innocence to disillusionment—could enjoy the poignant accuracy of the isolated happy moments children experienced in the camps, while simultaneously realizing the injustice of the internment. This particular "crowd" could read between



the lines of simplistic-sounding songs like “God Took a Photograph.” But a very different “crowd” drives the box office of mainstream American musical theatre, and it is to this scale of success that McCoy and Taguchi also aspire. The *New York Times* quotes McCoy as saying, “I couldn’t see the audience sitting through a lot of depression and having nothing to lift their spirits . . . . That’s what gave me the perspective that the children didn’t see it that way . . . . They kind of looked at the camp as like summer camp . . . . They could just run around and have fun.”<sup>22</sup> This “perspective” is reflected in songs like “This May Not Be Home (But It May Not Be That Bad).” Regardless of the intended audience or how potentially layered their reception of *Manzanar*, McCoy and Taguchi translate the internment into the perspective of children, for whom the conditions imposed upon them in World War II were deprived of historical meaning or political implications.

To build on Roland Barthes’s definition of “mythical speech” from his 1957 book *Mythologies*, McCoy and Taguchi thus mythologize the internment using the “raw material” of Taguchi’s mother’s experience. According to Barthes, mythical speech reduces its fictional or nonfiction material “to pure signifying function” and the “status of mere language,” thus depoliticizing historical subjects so they are “deprived of their history, changed into gestures.” Barthes sees mythologization as a bourgeois tool that legitimates the status quo: “For the very end of myths is to immobilize the world: they must suggest and mimic a universal order which has fixated once and for all the hierarchy of possessions.” Moreover, for Barthes, myth acts in a parasitic relationship to reality: “Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of explanation but that of a statement of fact.”<sup>23</sup> The universal order mimicked in *Manzanar* stifles the internment story’s counter-hegemonic potential because it assigns blame for atrocities and persecution to inhuman forces and locates the source of agency and success in the culture of our nation’s ultimate myth, the American Dream. McCoy and Taguchi’s emphasis on creating emotional peaks through a crowd-pleasingly innocent perspective effectively depoliticizes the internment even as it relies upon oral history accounts for “little snippets of what happens around the camp.”<sup>24</sup> In short, to turn the internment into commercially viable musical theatre, *Manzanar*’s creators wrenched the wartime events from their historical and political realities—which would create too much “depression” for an audience to sit through—and turned them into mere “gestures.”

Naomi Iizuka’s adaptation of Barry Denenberg’s 1999 fictional children’s book<sup>25</sup> utilizes another surrealist device to justify the internment for the preteen protagonist Ben Uchida and for the youth audience of *Citizen 13559*. Instead of the discursive references to otherworldly forces, Iizuka added two ghosts to the cast of characters in her 2002 stage adaptation. Working with director Chay Yew, Iizuka has workshopped *Citizen 13559* at the Kennedy Center and the Mark Taper

Forum's Asian Theatre Workshop, and the play will be produced as part of the new Kennedy Center Family Theater's inaugural season in Washington, D.C., in March 2006.<sup>26</sup> Iizuka has adapted the original book very liberally (though according to Iizuka, Denenberg has read and enjoyed the stage adaptation), and many of her choices lead the straightforward journal in more experimental directions that go beyond those merely necessary to adapt a story from the page to the stage. Foremost among the plot changes, Iizuka has Ben's Issei father kill himself, whereas he does not even attempt suicide in the book version.

Historically, the Issei father character has often taken on a haunted quality in camp plays and internment literature generally, a choice that in part reflects the actual psychological effect of World War II on many immigrant Japanese men, who could not naturalize despite decades of residence in the U.S. and whom the FBI chose to arrest and isolate as "enemy aliens" in Justice Department prison camps for months and years before reuniting them with their families in the larger internment camps. The nature of their interrogation in these Justice camps is still unclear (torture has been suspected but, of course, denied by our government).<sup>27</sup> Denenberg incorporates just such a plot point in his book, having Ben remark in the aftermath of the anticlimactic reunion after his father, Masao, is finally released from a Justice camp in Montana:

Sometimes I don't even think of him as Papa. He looks like my papa, but he doesn't act like him. The papa I knew was the one the FBI took away with them that night back home in San Francisco. I don't know what happened in that place in Montana, but they took the life out of my papa and left me just the shell.<sup>28</sup>

But Iizuka departs sharply from Denenberg's choice to have Ben's father haunted by unnamed U.S. government treatment. She instead has the Uchida family stay together throughout evacuation and portrays Masao as driven to suicide by his realization of his own folly in entrusting his farm's deed to a white neighbor. Motivated by the loss of the American Dream, Masao dies a most ignoble death, hung from the barracks rafters and discovered by his son. The discovery of his father's hanging body haunts Ben into adulthood, thus shifting the blame for the trauma of internment from the U.S. government in Denenberg's version to Masao's self-inflicted death in Iizuka's.

Despite the fact that Iizuka kills off Ben's father in her play, she found Denenberg's patriarch character to be her "access point" into the story, in part because she identified the father with her own Japanese father, who survived the U.S. firebombing of Tokyo to become a most fervently patriotic immigrant and believer in the American Dream. Iizuka told me that she incorporated Masao's suicide into her adaptation in order to create a dramatic "pivot point" and "pare

down the discursive quality” of the book. In so doing, Iizuka feels she altered Denenberg’s project to “become more of a memory play”:

The adult Ben Uchida is coming to terms with the suicide of his father, and that brings up all the issues of the internment experience and World War II and racism. [My] adaptation personalizes the loss. My instinct is that in theatre, especially with a young audience, is that it’s important to personalize the loss . . . . It has to hit home even more for the mechanism to work emotionally.<sup>29</sup>

Iizuka’s emphasis on “personalizing” the internment experience and making the play “work emotionally” strikingly echoes *Manzanar*’s creative mission.

Moreover, in order to accomplish this personalization and emotionalism, Iizuka turns Denenberg’s (fictionalized) historical novel into a “memory play”—a distinction through which Iizuka implicitly, if unintentionally, invokes a long-standing debate about Asian American aesthetics. Contrary to, for instance, Freddie Rokem’s designation of “historical drama,” which he uses to describe any type of play that dramatizes the non-fiction past, including realist and experimental works from artists ranging from Peter Brook to Ariane Mnouchkine, the use of the term “history plays” in much Asian American literary criticism is discussed in binary opposition to surrealist drama or experimental “memory plays.” Entering into this debate over Asian American writers’ common resort to the realist aesthetic (a debate prominently charted by Lisa Lowe in *Immigrant Acts*), theatre scholar Josephine Lee uses the term “history plays” to describe the mass of realist Asian American “historical narratives and fictionalized history plays” that communicate “the desire for an authenticating past that will support a communal future.” Significantly, as playwright Rosanna Yamagiwa Alfaro has aptly noted, “Most internment-camp plays are in the realistic vein.” In her book *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage*, Karen Shimakawa builds on Lee to question the revolutionary potential of realist history plays, noting

Representations of oppression are, after all, just that—representations; and although they operate to consolidate a community that may already know that history of oppression and to educate a theatre audience that... may not be familiar with those events, such reenactments alone do not have the power to negate the process, nor do they entirely dissipate its effects onstage or offstage.<sup>30</sup>

One might argue that, rather than representing the storied defeat of Issei men at

the hands of the FBI and Justice Department prison camps, Iizuka “dissipates its effects” by putting Masao’s undoing in his own hands. The former choice may indeed have merely reenacted the oppression without negating the process, as Shimakawa suggests. But Iizuka’s chosen alternative is to shift her adaptation’s register from realist historical drama to surrealist “memory play,” personalizing the internment experience for a wider audience by dramatizing the less historically specific (or politically inflected) experience of Ben “coming to terms with the suicide of his father.”

At the same time, Iizuka chose to promote a rather insignificant white character in the book—Ben’s teacher at the Mirror Lake Internment Camp, the strict Miss Kroll—and, through her, invents the character of her fallen soldier-husband, Mike. In this regard, Iizuka’s adaptation presents another radical departure from Denenberg’s children’s book, which is suffused with Ben’s caustic skepticism toward all “Caucasians” in the camp, a choice that deploys children’s characteristic bluntness to indict white racism and U.S. government policy. For instance, Denenberg’s Ben remarks upon one of the camp guards shooting an internee, Mr. Watanabe:

There was an article in the camp newspaper that said a review board was going to make a “full inquiry” into the recent “incident” involving Mr. Watanabe. That’s what they called it, an “incident.” The guy’s dead as a doornail and they call it an incident. I wonder what they would call the Civil War, a disturbance? There are only Caucasians on the review board, so nobody expects much.<sup>31</sup>

By rendering Watanabe’s death as part of a historical narrative rather than depoliticizing or dehistoricizing it, Denenberg’s Ben refuses to buy the government’s euphemisms. Iizuka, on the other hand, arranges her Ben in a relationship to white characters in the camp that serves to mythologize the internment and lend credence to what the U.S. Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians called the myth of “military necessity” that explained away the internment in history textbooks up through the 1980s.<sup>32</sup> After World War II, the myth of military necessity allowed the U.S. government to justify the evacuation and internment of Japanese Americans from the West Coast as the commonsensical response to the Japanese threat from abroad, rather than as the product of (white) Americans’ racial hostility toward those of Japanese descent living among them. Iizuka’s adaptation inadvertently upholds this hegemonic interpretation, whereby white agents of internment—from government officials, to camp teachers, to soldiers patrolling the guard towers—are rendered innocent products of an unfortunate situation. For instance, while Miss Kroll enters Iizuka’s stage as the stern schoolmarm written

by Denenberg, her character quickly develops into Ben's advocate, pushing him to live up to his potential and providing him a safe space in which to examine his situation, thus fulfilling his father's repeated advice: "Never be ashamed to ask a question."<sup>33</sup>

More importantly, by upgrading Miss Kroll's prominence in Ben's life, Iizuka was able to invent the character of Miss Kroll's deceased soldier-husband Mike as a ghost that speaks to Ben in one of his loneliest moments in the camp, on the eve of Masao's suicide. However, until the last scene, Ben only knows Mike as a kindly white soldier from Kenosha, Wisconsin, who mysteriously appears in his family's dusty barrack "apartment," shares his love for baseball, and encourages him to stay in school. This addition does more than create an otherworldly tone (even before we know that Mike's a ghost, we can recognize that, realistically, a white soldier would not be in an internment camp chatting it up with a Japanese American boy in his family's barrack apartment—in fact, Ben later confides to the audience that the soldier "wasn't what I thought he was going to be, I mean, he was kinda nice, way nicer than I thought he was going to be"). Iizuka's insertion of Mike also allows a not-too-brief moment of understanding and compassion between "oppressor" and "oppressed." The following dialogue provides a glimpse of this dynamic:

SOLDIER: Your Dad play baseball with you?

BEN: Nah. He's, well he's got a lot on his mind. Yours?

SOLDIER: Used to. I haven't been home in a long time.

BEN: I miss home. I miss how things used to be. I miss how my Mom and Dad and my sister and me, how we used to be.

[*Beat.*] Have you killed people?

(*SOLDIER nods.*)

BEN: People like me?

SOLDIER: What? People from San Francisco?

BEN: No. I mean—You know what I mean.

SOLDIER: I did what I was told. If I had it to do over, I'd do things different.

(*BEN and the SOLDIER scan the landscape.*)<sup>34</sup>

It is important to reiterate that Denenberg's original book contains no such empathetic interracial exchanges at Mirror Lake.

In the dramatic scenes that follow, Ben is the target of Miss Kroll's pedagogical brand of tough love and he is introduced for the first time to snow, which will become an omen of death that haunts Ben into adulthood.<sup>35</sup> Distracted by his first glimpse of snow, Ben misses a question directed at him, initiating the following exchange:

MISS KROLL: You act like you've never seen snow before.

BEN: Where I come from, it doesn't snow. I'm not from here.

None of us are. We don't belong. We don't belong here. We don't belong at home either. We don't belong anywhere.

MISS KROLL: Benjamin—

BEN: My name isn't Benjamin. I don't have a name. I have a number. 13559. Just call me by my number. That's all I am anyway, a number.

MISS KROLL: I said that's enough. Do you know the process by which snow forms? Do you know that each individual snowflake is a fractal?

BEN: No. I don't. Why do you ask so many questions?

Because, you know, actually, I have some questions of my own. Like how long are we going to be here? Why are we even here in the first place? What's the point of knowing all these stupid facts if we're just going to be stuck here forever? Why bother?

MISS KROLL: The person who thinks "why bother" is the person who has given up. Have you given up, Benjamin? Do you give up so easily?

BEN: What do you know?

MISS KROLL: You disappoint me.

BEN: What do you know?

MISS KROLL: I know I won't stand for excuses. I won't stand for self-pity.

BEN: What do you know? You don't know. You don't know anything.

*(BEN exits. MISS KROLL recedes into the background.*

*Outside. BEN runs away from the schoolhouse. He runs through the snow.)<sup>36</sup>*

Preceding, as it does, Ben's discovery of Masao's hanging body, this scene seems a direct indictment of the father's decision to indulge in "self-pity" and "give up so easily" by resorting to suicide. However, this last camp scene between Ben and Miss Kroll also initiates the trope of snow, which becomes actualized in a stage picture of blinding "whiteness" created from the accumulation of references to "White snow," "White sheets [on his mother's clothesline]," "White sky," and the "White, white [sun]light" that bathes his father's hanging body. Iizuka's stage directions call for Ben's father's body to be seen in the unlikely "shadows" of this blinding "whiteness," visible to his son only "in silhouette."<sup>37</sup>

The crushing whiteness that seems to drive the drama toward Masao's

inevitable suicide, rendered in negative relationship to it, at first appears a striking visualization of the U.S. hegemony of the white race and the white supremacist underpinning of the American Dream that lead to racist policies like the internment. Indeed, this scene's discursive repetition of an earlier staging device initially offers this political interpretation. Near the beginning of *Citizen 13559*, Iizuka follows radio announcements of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor by having the Chorus—consisting of the two white actors plus the actors who play Ben's parents and sister—“*plastering the space with sheets of paper . . . tap[ing] sheets of paper to the walls, to the chairs.*” This blanketing of white paper, suggestive of the Japanese American evacuation orders posted by the military after President Roosevelt's passage of Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942, presents an initial atmosphere of crushing whiteness that seems to drive the characters inevitably toward internment. Indeed, by anachronistically occurring right after the December 7, 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, Iizuka's storm of white papers serves a symbolic and emotional rather than literal or historical purpose. Iizuka's point seems to be that Ben does not notice the increasing white racism toward Japanese Americans that is encroaching upon his freedom until his sister Naomi asks her oblivious brother, “What's the matter with you? Where have you been? Haven't you seen any of the notices?” When Ben finally “*reads at one of the [white] sheets of paper that cover the space,*” he realizes for the first time that his non-white ethnicity calls his Americanism into question; as Naomi puts it, “We look Japanese. Our grandparents were Japanese. That's all that matters.”<sup>38</sup>

However, the equation of these traumatically white stage pictures with the whiteness of U.S. nationalism falls apart in the resolution of the play and the all-important final moments onstage. As mentioned previously, the adult Ben spends some of these final moments with Miss Kroll, “years later” at her home in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Following a scene in which the adult Ben speaks to the physicalized ghost of his father, the now-elderly Miss Kroll asks Ben, “Do you believe in ghosts?” To which Ben answers, “I didn't used to. I used to think they were fantasy, make-believe.” It is precisely this “fantasy” upon which the final interracial alliance of the play is founded, rather than on the historical realities of the camps. Miss Kroll reveals that her husband, Mike, was killed in combat in World War II at age 19 and that she “went to Mirror Lake after he died,” where she once thought she “saw him. Standing in the snow watching me.” Her sighting of Mike's ghost takes place in a vision of winter whiteness just as Ben's discovery of Masao's actual body did; Miss Kroll relates to Ben that her vision was “in the middle of winter when the sky was so gray and the earth was frozen solid and it was so cold.”<sup>39</sup>

The parallelism between Ben's and Miss Kroll's respective encounters with their deceased loved ones is reinforced by the shared trope of whiteness. In the process, this parallelism both empties whiteness of its politicized racial content and denies the historical specificity of Japanese American internment by facilely

equating it with the “military necessity” that extracted a wartime toll from all Americans, regardless of race. Ben’s final soliloquy assures the audience of the universality of the internment story for people of all backgrounds—simply a story “about people”—as he repeats to them his opening lines: “My name is Ben. My number was 13559. And this is not my story. Not really. This is a story about war, but it’s not about soldiers or battles or fighter planes or warships. It’s about people [on the home front].” Ben’s second iteration of this curtain speech repeats his opening lines with an important difference: at first, he more exclusively claimed, “And this is not my story. Not really. This is a story about my father.”<sup>40</sup>

By disavowing any familial or even Japanese American proprietary right to the internment story, Iizuka makes Ben cut the historical events from their context so the internment can function as a fantastical myth that circulates as a universal experience for every audience member, regardless of their raced relationship to “whiteness.” *Citizen 13559* thus mythologizes the raw material of internment by depriving it of history and politics and rendering it for its present use value, if not as a post-9/11 morality tale, then to serve what Iizuka called the “ur-theatrical function” sought by every theatre artist. She described this “ur-theatrical function” as operating to “spark and be a lightening rod for a civic issue with real life resonance today and also a place where submerged emotions can find voice.” Iizuka spoke of her surprise at the outpouring of emotionalism, particularly deep sorrow, experienced by the ethnically mixed workshop audiences for *Citizen 13559* at the Mark Taper Forum and the Kennedy Center. While adapting Denenberg’s book, Iizuka focused on the “craft and architecture” of Ben’s story rather than “sitting at my computer weeping,” so the connection with the audience that was enacted on the workshop stages changed her perception of her play from an “intellectually” faithful adaptation to a “much more emotionally volatile and deeper experience.”<sup>41</sup>

*Manzanar*’s and *Citizen 13559*’s sobbing audiences are not alone, as the intense, almost cathartically emotional reception of post-9/11 camp plays has allowed these dramas to find stages outside what Rose Yamagiwa Alfaro has called Asian American theatre’s “cultural internment camps.” “The reaction,” Alfaro wrote before 9/11, “of many younger Asian American playwrights [to the internment theme] is, ‘Been there, done that.’ It is as if we have been imprisoned by our ethnicity for much too long and need to mingle with the world at large.”<sup>42</sup> Whether in Los Angeles-area schools or in the inaugural season of the Kennedy Center’s Family Theater, post-9/11 camp plays have moved outside the Asian American theatre scene and address the internment in a more universal fashion, unfettered by any historical and political “imprison[ment]” of Japanese American “ethnicity.” This more universal appeal has been misrecognized by many audiences and critics—and cynically packaged by some artistic directors and marketing departments—as dramatizing a political commentary against Bush’s War on Terror and the persecution of Arab Americans. I would like to suggest that the resonance



of recent camp plays to the post-9/11 world is an emotional resonance rather than a political one, and that these stagings of the internment experience provide an occasion for the “melancholia” that literary critic David Eng recognized as an appropriate response to terror in the wake of 9/11.

In December 2001, *Theatre Journal* published a special issue on tragedy, which included a 44-page forum section for scholars “to respond to the concept of tragedy in the context of [the] world-changing events” of the terrorists attacks and the U.S. militarist response.<sup>43</sup> David Eng wrote an article for the special issue in which he observes the political and aesthetic value of melancholia as a response to 9/11 and to tragedy in general. Moved by the spontaneous displays of “home-made posters for ‘missing persons’” that appeared all over New York City in the wake of the attacks, Eng notes that, on a personal and state level, such melancholy presents a viable alternative to the hermetic terms of mourning, which “reduces the globe to an ‘us’ and a ‘them.’” In the case of the mainstream U.S. response to 9/11, Eng argues that such “(state) mourning” proclaimed “You are with US or you are against US,” a politics that “works to obviate the potential of tragedy, as [Walter] Benjamin provocatively suggests, to be *a preliminary stage of prophecy*. It does so precisely through the severing—the silencing—of the past.” Eng champions the response of melancholia (as theorized by Freud) because “the melancholic leaves history open for continual re-negotiation . . . unlike mourning, in which the past is declared resolved, finished, and dead, in melancholia the past remains steadfastly alive in the present.”<sup>44</sup>

Camp plays have long represented a potential space for the enactment of melancholia, but in a much more closed fashion prior to 9/11. The most striking example of melancholically repeating the internment past in the theatrical present was the 1981–82 production season of the two most prominent Asian American theatre companies in the country at that time, East West Players and New York’s Pan Asian Repertory Theater. Both companies devoted their season entirely to plays about the internment, choices that inadvertently ghettoized both the historical event and the rituals surrounding its observation. East West Player’s “Kidoairaku” cycle consisted of four plays: Richard France’s *Station J*, Dom Magwili and Mako’s *Christmas in Camp*, Wakako Yamauchi’s *I2-I-A*, and Edward Sakamoto’s *Pilgrimage*. *Station J* was also part of the Pan Asian Rep internment season; France’s play rounded out their trilogy, which began with Lionelle Hamanaka’s *Rohwer* and Alfaro’s *Behind Enemy Lines*. Critics were relatively generous, but at East West Players in particular, audiences did not receive the camp plays well (ticket sales lagged and some subscribers even cancelled their subscriptions), despite the undeniable political activism accomplished by providing a venue for former internees to finally talk about their long-silenced wartime experiences.<sup>45</sup> It is telling that both theatre companies decided to produce *Station J*, a three-hour political epic that ritually retells the official and unofficial discrimination suffered

by Japanese Americans in World War II. The play called for a presentational, even didactic performance style that included frequent projections of historical documents and quotations on a cyclorama and the conjuring of historical figures (like President Roosevelt and his Supreme Court Justices) to reenact the policy decisions that made the internment come to pass. At the same time, the emotional toll of these political injustices was shown in *Station J's* realistic, domestic focus on the Shigeta family interned at the Jerome, Arkansas, camp.

By contrast, recent theatre has rendered the internment a pacifying myth while markedly rejecting the notoriously pacifying genre of realism. As *Manzanar* and *Citizen 13559* demonstrate, since 9/11 camp plays have broken out of the realist box and approached the internment with artistic visions less attuned to strict history. I have argued that both plays convert the internment into a portable “gesture,” to draw from Barthes’s discussion of “mythical speech,” but McCoy, Taguchi, and Iizuka also effectively create the melancholic openness that Eng calls for in his article.<sup>46</sup> By becoming more visible and provoking such passionate audience responses, these plays have kept the U.S. historical propensity to assault the civil liberties’ of its citizens and residents of color both on the theatrical record and alive in public discourse. These plays reject what theatre scholar Diana Taylor criticized, in the *Theatre Journal* special issue, as tragedy’s inappropriate logic of containment. “Take tragedy’s organizational timetable: beginning, middle, and end,” Taylor wrote. “Did the tragic action really start on September 11th? Some might argue that we were hijacked long before September 11th, maybe starting last fall [2000] when the elections were pulled off course.”<sup>47</sup> Post-9/11 camp plays suggest for their audiences that “we were hijacked” immediately after Pearl Harbor, when the U.S. government first tread on the constitution to legitimize racist fear and facilitate the disenfranchisement and persecution of a minority. Through the repetition of these traumatic historical events, and almost without regard to the politics or intentions offered by the playwrights, the performance of camp plays since 9/11 is a melancholic and emotionally resonant experience for post-9/11 audiences.

However, as Eng argued earlier, in his book *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America*, such “hypervisibility” can easily become a trap because “neither invisibility nor visibility guarantees Asian American subjects access to or membership in the [U. S.] nation-state” because the interplay of enforced presence and absence “work in historical tandem to configure and reconfigure the Asian immigrant as the phantasmatic screen on which the nation projects its shifting anxieties of coherence and stability.”<sup>48</sup> The reception of recent camp plays, made more open to interpretation by their mythologizing dramaturgy, enacts Eng’s casting of the Asian American body as “phantasmatic screen” for the “shifting anxieties” of the U.S. in the post-9/11 world. Scholarship on the legacy of the internment in U.S. culture confirms my fear that such instrumentalizing of the raw material of internment absents this history even as it seems to pay it

unprecedented attention.

Media scholar Marita Sturken and literary critic Caroline Chung Simpson have both described the internment as *An Absent Presence* (the title of Simpson's 2001 book, but a term first offered by Sturken in 1997) that ghosts many popular representations of the war years and their aftermath. Simpson claims, "the centrality of internment in some [postwar and cold war] discourses 'screens' it from view and . . . the dismissal or diminution of internment's importance in other cases may sometimes merely underscore its significance." Even since the U.S. government formally apologized and paid reparation to former internees in 1988, Sturken claims that the internment shuttles into and out of visibility and has "produced no singular-image icons" as other historical events have and "ultimately can find no such traditional narratives of conflict, resistance, or brutal injustice" because its "images are overwhelmed" and presented "primarily through their absence."<sup>49</sup> Although Eng, Sturken, and Simpson focus on hegemonic representations of Japanese Americans, post-9/11 camp plays written and directed by minority theatre artists suggest that, as the "earnest drama" of the internment is traded for prophetically haunting renderings of camp life, the dear cost may be the singular narratives of Japanese American historical subjects.

## Notes

1. I date the birth of this professional theatre project to Soon-Tek Oh's 1970 play *Tondemonai* (*Never Happen*), which placed second in the East West Players 1970 playwriting contest and was staged by the company in May of that year. *Tondemonai*'s lead character, Koji Murayama, can trace all his "psychological problems," as theatre historian Tamayo Irene Morioka-Steffens puts it, to the "core trauma" of internment. Tamayo Irene Morioka-Steffens, "Asian Pacific American Identities: An Historical Perspective through the Theatre Productions of the East West Players, 1965 to 2000" (dissertation: Claremont Graduate University, 2003).

2. The quote is from *San Francisco Chronicle* theatre critic Steven Winn, though it is typical of the condescension with which many camp plays were critically received by the mainstream press. Winn was reviewing Japanese Canadian R. A. Shiomi's internment memory play *Uncle Tadao*, a reworking of Arthur Miller's postwar drama *All My Sons* that was directed by Lane Nishikawa at Asian American Theater. According to the critic, *Uncle Tadao* "makes a case for the financial and emotional redress without translating that conviction into an absorbing drama." Steven Winn, "Ghosts of Wartime Internment: 'Uncle Tadao' Drama at the Asian American Theater," *San Francisco Chronicle* April 17, 1992.

3. Following other scholars and practitioners of Asian American theatre, I will use the shorthand term "camp play" throughout this essay to connote any drama written about the forced evacuation and incarceration of Japanese Americans in World War II "concentration camps" (to use President Roosevelt's own term for these remote internment sites).

4. For example, ticket sales for Los Angeles-based playwright Oliver Mayer's wartime play *Conjunto* went "through the roof" after one such article was published, comparing the play's subplot (about Japanese American farmers facing internment and thus turning over their land to Latino workers) to the contemporary treatment of Arab and Muslim Americans. For more on *Conjunto*'s savvy marketing approach after 9/11, see San Francisco's KQED Public Television's "Spark TV" program, which featured an episode on Teatro Visión's struggle to bring *Conjunto* to the stage. *Spark: Teatro Visión* (KQED Public Television, San Francisco, 2003) [cited August 9, 2004]; available from <<http://www.kqed.org/spark/artists-orgs/teatrovisi.jsp>>.

5. Another instance of dramatizing internment through the eyes of the child comes in the framing of solo performer Denise Uyehara's *Big Head*, which, contrary to *Manzanar* and *Citizen 13559*, is quite explicitly about the parallels between the internment and the persecution of Arab Americans after 9/11. The play was conceived well before 9/11, but was indeed prescient insofar as Uyehara saw early indications of where U. S. policy toward Americans of Arab and Muslim descent was headed. Denise Uyehara, *Maps of City and Body: Shedding Light on the Performances of Denise Uyehara* (New York: Kaya Press, 2003).

6. Ian Johns, "Look Back in Anguish: Theatre: American Dramatists Are Still Trying to Come to Terms with 9/11," *The Times* (London) October 27, 2003.

7. I do not want to thrust this self-identification upon Iizuka either. But she openly discusses her heritage: she was born in Japan to a Japanese father and a Cuban-Spanish-American mother. Iizuka has resided in the U. S. since age six.

8. Naomi Iizuka, personal interview, September 13, 2004. In the *Theatre Journal* Forum section devoted to the 9/11 tragedy, scholar Ann Pellegrini articulated similar concerns about analogies between the past and the present moments. Pellegrini warned of such analogies, "We need to question this presumption of known-ness, which can as easily impede understanding as inform it [ . . . for instance] when we make December 7, 1941 the patriotic ground of coming to know September 11, 2001, we may forget more than we know, making it impossible to recognize differences between now and then. Moreover once the past is put into the service of justifying action in the present (most prominently, military action), we also make it impossible to see the past except in the light of contemporary needs and demands." Although Pellegrini clearly referred to December 7 as the U. S. justification for entering World War II, it is interesting to ponder whether the apparently opposite political project of protesting the treatment of Middle Eastern Americans after 9/11 on the basis of what happened to Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor is equally dangerous. Ann Pellegrini, "A Forum on Theatre and Tragedy in the Wake of September 11, 2001," *Theatre Journal* 54 (2002) 113-14.

9. Jonathan D. Glater, "Out of the Pain of the Japanese-American Internments, a Musical Play Rises," *New York Times* May 27, 2003: E5. McCoy is African American and his race has been presented as an overcome obstacle in press treatments of *Manzanar*. For instance, an *Asian Week* article read, "McCoy, who is African American, was not too enthusiastic at first to work on this musical, but he quickly changed his mind. 'I was really resistant to it at first,' he said, 'because I couldn't find the way to make it personal to me. Three years ago, Dan brought all of these books about the internment to me, and I started reading them. That's when it all came alive to me. I realized this is a story that specifically happened to Japanese Americans, but overall, this is a story about human beings and how they were treated . . . This is something that should never happen again.'" Sam Chu Lin, "Manzanar Internment Camp Experience

Becomes a Musical,” *Asian Week* March 8-14, 2002: Arts and Entertainment section.

10. Marvin Carlson, “9/11, Afghanistan, and Iraq: The Response of the New York Theatre,” *Theatre Survey* 45.1 (May 2004) 13.

11. Carlson, “9/11, Afghanistan, and Iraq” 14-15. In his recent book *Performing History*, theatre scholar Freddie Rokem suggests that these “historical analogies” are “much stronger than the forms of analogy created by purely fictional genres of theatre,” and he makes a point of emphasizing “that there is nothing inherently ‘wrong’ in using such [historical] analogies.” I concur with Rokem that there is nothing morally “wrong” with analogizing historical events with the contemporary moment, either on the part of theatre artists or the audience (including critics). My critique of the reception of post-9/11 camp plays does not take any moral stances, but only seeks to clarify the actual dynamics of these plays as written and performed. Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 2000) 19, 23-24.

12. Rus McCoy and Dan Taguchi, “Manzanar: Story of an American Family” (unpublished manuscript, May 2005) 14-15. FBI agents do not escort Toyo away in the 45-minute youth touring version; to simplify the story, Toyo stays with the rest of the Shimada family in their evacuation to Santa Anita and then Manzanar.

13. The audience members who speak at theatre talkbacks are a notoriously self-selected group and should in no way be construed as a representative sample of overall audience reception. In particular, audience members (like myself) who may have disagreed with the parallels being drawn by the vocal few, or who were troubled by the depoliticized vision of the play, would be unlikely to express these critical views in such a public forum (I instead silently jotted down notes). In my experience, aesthetically complimentary and/or socially affirmative comments are the expected fare in such talkbacks and generally dominate in normative post-show discussions.

14. Although the bulk of *Manzanar*’s performances have been on the school tour circuit, East West Players has produced the full-length musical in various degrees of production. Notably, a 2003 staged reading of *Manzanar* drew the largest audience ever assembled—more than 800 people—for a performance at the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center (JACCC), which is “the largest ethnic cultural center in the US” according to its website, a building which has stood in Los Angeles’s Little Tokyo since 1980. *JACCC: Our Mission* (Japanese American Cultural & Community Center, 2004 [cited January 17, 2005]); available from <<http://www.jacc.org/jacc/jaccmission.html>>. *The New York Times* covered this performance of the musical.

15. This is not to suggest that melodrama cannot be political or that the genres of melodrama and political theatre are mutually exclusive. The moral and emotional force characteristic of melodrama has been deployed for political agitation throughout American theatrical history; Henry Grimm’s anti-miscegenation melodrama *The Chinese Must Go* and dramatizations of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* are only two memorable examples. I want to thank a *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* reviewer for reminding me of this important history.

16. McCoy and Taguchi, “Manzanar” 34.

17. 35. On the other hand, many of the elderly Nisei audience members would have been approximately Margaret’s age at the time of internment and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, and thus may experience binocular vision as spectators to this scene in particular. In other words, such spectators might empathize with Margaret’s innocent, politically sanitized view of the U. S. government’s actions

while simultaneously acknowledging their mature awareness of Hiroshima's political causality, human effects, and U. S. culpability. I am grateful to a *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* reviewer for suggesting this nuance.

18. Significantly, the 2001 Public Theatre production of Hagedorn's stage adaptation of *Dogeaters* downplayed Rio to a very circumscribed, supporting character.

19. Debra T. Werlein, "Legacies of the 'Innocent' Frontier: Failed Memory and the Infantilized Filipina Expatriate in Jessica Hagedorn's *Dogeaters*," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 7.1 (February 2004) 40, 43.

20. McCoy and Taguchi, "Manzanar" 7, 40, 1.

21. Lin, "Manzanar Internment Camp Experience Becomes a Musical."

22. Glater, "Out of the Pain of the Japanese-American Internments."

23. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972) 114, 122, 143, 155.

24. This was McCoy's description of their research process, cited above.

25. Barry Denenberg, *The Journal of Ben Uchida: Citizen 13559, Mirror Lake Internment Camp, My Name Is America* (New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1999). The book is part of the popular "My Name Is America" series of fictional journals that use fictionalized accounts to suggest to young readers what different historical moments were like for those who lived through them. Other books in the series include *The Journal of William Thomas Emerson: A Revolutionary War Patriot* (also by Denenberg) and *The Journal of Joshua Loper: A Black Cowboy*. The Kennedy Center commissioned several playwrights to adapt various books from this series for young audiences.

26. Iizuka's adaptation is book-ended by two other world premiere productions: Kim Hines's adaptation of Whoopi Goldberg's children's book *Alice* and the musical *Walking the Winds: Arabian Tales*, which is a collaboration with the Performing Arts Center of Amman, Jordan. According to the *New York Times*, the Family Theater's inaugural season stands as "the first effort in a broader commitment by the Kennedy Center to invest \$125 million in performing-arts education over the next five years." Lynette Clemetson, "A New Family Theater," *New York Times* December 7, 2005: E2.

27. For examples of haunted/haunting Issei father figures in camp plays see Wakako Yamauchi's *I2-I-A* (1981) and Chay Yew's production of Philip Kan Gotanda's *Sisters Matsumoto* for East West Players (2002).

28. Denenberg, *The Journal of Ben Uchida* 120.

29. Iizuka, personal interview, September 13, 2004.

30. Rokem, *Performing History*: Josephine Lee, *Performing Asian America: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1997) 36, 45, 137. Rosanna Yamagiwa Alfaro, "Ethnic Expectations: The Politics of Staging the Internment Camps," *Last Witnesses: Reflections on the Wartime Internment of Japanese Americans*, ed. Erica Harth (New York: Palgrave, 2001) 211. Karen Shimakawa, *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002) 99.

31. Denenberg, *The Journal of Ben Uchida* 101-102.

32. Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC), United States, *Personal Justice Denied* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1997) xix.

33. Naomi Iizuka, "Citizen 13559: An Adaptation of *The Journal of Ben Uchida*" (unpublished

manuscript, September 2002) 22.

34. Iizuka, "Citizen 13559" 30-34. In addition to playing Miss Kroll and Soldier Mike, the two white actors in the five- or six-person cast also play a number of racist stock characters like Radio Announcer, The Caller, and Neighbor. Iizuka also adds a chorus consisting of all the actors (Asian and non-Asian) in the play, excepting the boy playing Ben. This chorus embodies factions on both sides of the oppressor-oppressed divide and, in Iizuka's words, "compresses" the "growing hatred" directed against Japanese Americans following Pearl Harbor in order to give the play "momentum." Iizuka, personal interview, September 13, 2004.

35. Importantly, Iizuka adapts the trope of snow from a very different reference in Denenberg's book. In the novel, Ben writes in his journal of a screening of the film *Citizen Kane* in the camp and describes with interest Kane's deathbed memory of "the snowy day when his mama sent him away." Ben wryly remarks that, whereas Kane's last word refers to the "Rosebud" inscribed on his lost sled, Ben's "last words might be Mirror Lake." Denenberg, *The Journal of Ben Uchida* 110.

36. Iizuka, "Citizen 13559" 39-40.

37. 41-43.

38. 9, 11-12.

39. 45-46.

40. 47, 1.

41. Iizuka, personal interview, May 25, 2005.

42. Alfaro, "Ethnic Expectations" 205, 210. Alfaro is herself Japanese American and has penned at least one camp play. It is important to note that she is paraphrasing what she identifies as some of her peers' opinions when she writes about the notion of "cultural internment camps."

43. David Román, "A Forum on Theatre and Tragedy in the Wake of September 11, 2001," *Theatre Journal* 54 (2002) 95.

44. David Eng, "The Value of Silence," *Theatre Journal* 54 (2002) 85, 87-88. Emphasis added.

45. Yuko Kurahashi, *Asian American Culture on Stage: The History of the East West Players* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999) 147-48. See also Morioka-Steffens, "Asian Pacific American Identities."

46. Other examples of post-9/11 camp plays that appropriate the internment as a gesture for theatrical experiments outside the realist box of strict historical dramas include: Uyehara's aforementioned *Big Head*, Keith Uchima's ganster-noir *Seven Out*, Chay Yew's docudrama *Question 27*, *Question 28*, and Liebe Wetzels's puppet show *E. O. 9066*.

47. Diana Taylor, "A Forum on Theatre and Tragedy in the Wake of September 11, 2001," *Theatre Journal* 54 (2002) 96.

48. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke UP, 2001) 109-10. To demonstrate the strategic visibility and invisibility imposed upon Asian American men by the U. S. government and the dominant media, Eng gives the examples of the "hypervisibility" of Japanese American men after Pearl Harbor (as they were spectacularly targeted by the FBI) and the erasure of Chinese American railroad workers from iconography of the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad.

49. Caroline Chung Simpson, *An Absent Presence: Japanese Americans in Postwar American*

*Culture, 1945-1960* (Durham: Duke UP, 2001) 4. Marita Sturken, "Absent Images of Memory: Remembering and Reenacting the Japanese Internment," *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)*, ed. T. Fujitani, Geoffrey M. White, and Lisa Yoneyama (Durham: Duke UP, 2001) 38, 40, 36.