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Decolonizing the Stage: An Analysis of Edward Sakamoto's *Pilgrimage* and Jay Kuo,
Lorenzo Thione, and Marc Acito's *Allegiance*

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It is a bleak historical moment in which I write. Progressive forces seem increasingly embattled ... Is this the last gasp of a threatened power structure whose days are numbered, or the beginning of the end of the progress hard won by disempowered groups – women, people of color, gays and lesbians, among others ...? (Kondo 1997:3)

– Dorinne Kondo, *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater*

INTRODUCTION

Frantz Fanon's biographer David Macey states "[t]he time is right to reread [*The Wretched of the Earth*] ... because 'Fanon was angry,' and without the basic political instinct of anger there can be no hope for 'the wretched of the earth [who] are still with us'" (Bhabha 2004: loc 99 [Kindle version]). Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* is a foundational decolonization text which, among other topics, discusses the inevitability of violence in the decolonization process. Decolonization is the reversal of colonialism, which Gary Okihiro defines as "the exploitation of the lands and peoples of the 'darker races'" (2016: loc 535). Though I am not an advocate for violence as the only path to decolonization, I relate to Fanon's anger because I am angry, too. The U.S. is in the middle of another "bleak historical moment" (Kondo 1997:3). Globally, the President of the United States is a destabilizing force, and domestically, he stokes the flames of division and resorts to diversionary tactics when the issue of race comes up (e.g., police brutality). I am angry because no one wants to talk about race. I am angry for my Japanese mother who lives in the U.S. and for my black husband, both of whom have had their fair share of racist (and sometimes violent) experiences. I am angry for my friends who are of color and feel alone in the U.S. I am angry for myself as a mixed-race woman who does not have a place in either of my countries of heritage because I complicate

multiple binaries. Talking about race is not racist. Talking about race is the only way to begin to rise above it.

This paper addresses Japanese American internment during World War II and the use of expressive arts such as music and theater to decolonize, humanize “others,” and address historical gaps through an analysis of two theatrical productions about Japanese American internment, Edward Sakamoto’s play *Pilgrimage* (1981) and Jay Kuo, Lorenzo Thione, and Marc Acito’s musical *Allegiance* (2015). After Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066 authorizing the forced removal of over 100,000 people of Japanese ancestry from their homes and their relocation to remote concentration camps across the nation. *Pilgrimage* is one of many plays about internment debuting during the Japanese American movement and subsequent Congressional hearings for reparations in the 1980s. Though *Pilgrimage* is not a musical, music features significantly and does political work of its own. The election of Donald Trump has given Japanese American internment a new relevance, particularly when considering Trump’s attempts to ban travel to the U.S. according to religion and his tacit complicity with his white supremacist base. Coupled with the timing of *Allegiance*’s broadcast in movie theaters nationwide (the first broadcast took place in December 2016, one month after the Presidential election), the musical is an ideal choice for analysis. In response to Trump’s December 2015 *TIME* interview in which he expressed uncertainty about whether he would oppose internment had he been a leader during World War II (Scherer 2015), George Takei extended an open invitation to Trump

to attend a performance of *Allegiance* (*Allegiance* Trump Watch, n.d.). He has yet to attend.

In my discussion of *Pilgrimage* and *Allegiance*, I engage with Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns' expansion of Catherine Ceniza Choy's concept of corporeal colonization to include "American popular dance and music, fashion, and social mores" (2008:32). Corporeal *decolonization* reverses this process; in the context of music and theater, it decolonizes the stage and humanizes Asian Americans by giving them the agency to define who they are and tell their stories rather than being defined and historicized by those who would subjugate them. In writing this paper, I was also inspired by Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*, in which he writes about colonialism as dehumanization, and Robert G. Lee's concepts of "foreign" and "alien" with regard to Asian American popular culture.

Japanese American internment and recent travel bans share the aspect of bodily control. I employ the concept of corporeal colonization to position plays and musicals like *Pilgrimage* and *Allegiance* as a means of corporeal *decolonization*. Choy uses the theory in the context of the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair when Filipinos were literally put on display (Choy 2003), but it is Burns' application that I highlight and subsequently reverse in this paper. In her article "'Splendid Dancing': Filipino 'Exceptionalism' in Taxi Dancehalls," Burns situates "exceptional" Filipino dancing "alongside the American empire's spectacularization of the Filipino body as inferior, infectious, and ultimately savage" (2008:25). Without resorting to force, American music and dance served as "benign technologies of cultural expressions" for reinforcing American imperial ideology

and displacing Filipino practices (32). It was, as Burns aptly states, an “insidious” means of reinforcing America’s position at the top of cultural and racial hierarchies (ibid.). Filipino “exceptionalism,” however, was also a threat to American men in terms of employment and masculinity, thus their positioning as exceptional dancers (in taxi dancehalls) and inferior beings (outside of the dancehall) (24). Colonization is not just about reinforcing American superiority; it is also about dehumanization.

In *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire writes about colonialism and civilization as antithetical concepts ([1955] 2000:31-33). One cannot claim to be civilized and colonize others (ibid.).

[C]olonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it ... [T]he colonizer in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as *an animal* ... [He] accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal” (40-41).

It is the colonizer who is the true savage; in the process of dehumanizing the “other,” the colonizer dehumanizes himself as he regresses from human to savage behavior (ibid.).

Decolonization, then, is the reversal of the dehumanization process. It is the decolonization of “our minds, our inner life ... [and] society” (94). I specifically reference Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* because it is another key text that connects colonialism to constructions of race and dehumanization. I, too, assert that it is impossible to divorce race from colonialism since constructions of race arose in tandem with the European colonization of America and are still in place today. Robin D.G. Kelley states in his introduction to Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* that colonialism

may no longer exist formally, but it still exists in every other capacity ([1955] 2000:27). Colonial constructions continue to permeate society – in education, film, theater, etc. Textbooks teach children selective histories, omitting details that complicate binaries or call into question Western superiority. Therefore, other forms of education, such as the expressive arts, are necessary. They fill in the gaps. In addition, because the expressive arts often portray the human condition, they grant the humanity “others” are often denied by Western society.

Robert G. Lee describes Asian Americans as “permanent aliens in America” and the fraught differences between the terms foreign and alien (1999:4). He defines alien as “objects or persons whose presence disrupts the narrative structure of the community” (3). It is acceptable, even positive, to be foreign in the U.S. Foreigners are temporary, they are possibly viewed as exotic, and, most importantly, they will return to their homeland (ibid.). It is unacceptable, however, to be an alien. Aliens “have a foreign nature or allegiance” (flagged in the very title of *Allegiance*), and they are not returning to their “homeland” (ibid.). The difference, Lee states, is political (ibid.). Since Asian Americans are often regarded as permanent aliens, they never become a part of the U.S. narrative, which means that they are a permanent threat and must be distanced (3-4). Distance not only applies to internment camps which were purposefully located in remote locations throughout the U.S., but it also applies to theater, film, and other sectors of the entertainment industry. Asian Americans are distanced from prominent roles (even when roles call for Asians), and their truths (i.e., their histories, their subjectivities) are distanced from the U.S. narrative. Hollywood makes Asian characters palatable by

casting white actors (Mannur 2010:1-24). A historical play about Asian American trauma means making the subject matter palatable for mainstream audiences (e.g., through the inclusion of “forbidden” romance in *Allegiance*, or possibly through the very use of musical theater, a stereotypically “happy” medium, though it is also true that music can convey emotions and truths in a way that text alone cannot [Hertvik 2016]). It is important that audiences went to see an (almost) all-Asian cast on Broadway. Was this made possible by making *Allegiance* palatable (Mannur 2010:1-24)? In some ways, it was made more palatable. In other ways, events were made *more* dramatic, *more* violent. Was it not already terrible, Niiya asks (2017). This is not a criticism of *Allegiance*. If anything, it is a criticism of the U.S. entertainment industry. I contend that the failure of U.S. filmmakers to cast Asian and Asian American actors in lead roles is an indication that audiences are not prepared for theater that implicates the U.S. government in the incarceration of American citizens without some element of palatability.

A sense of Western superiority and rigid binaries (e.g., us versus them, civilized versus savage, values versus no values) led colonizers to view the world’s resources and lands as their right. It also made Japanese American internment possible. Internment is not a vestige of colonialism because “vestige” implies that colonialism no longer exists. Internment was colonialism in a different guise, and it took place within our own borders. The Japanese American is granted U.S. citizenship by birth or naturalization, but citizenship does not guarantee humanity. Citizenship is akin to a hunting license. They both give license to physically be somewhere, but there is no guarantee beyond that. With forehand knowledge that internment was not a “military necessity” (Nakagawa 2017),

the U.S. sent Japanese Americans to internment camps anyway, with internees losing homes and livelihoods in the process. Why would the U.S. intern Japanese Americans if they were not a military threat? My answer to that question is racism and white supremacy, along with the fear of losing its position of power in an increasingly globalized world. It is with Choy, Burns, Césaire, and Lee in mind that I offer my own contribution to music and theater as methods of decolonization, specifically corporeal decolonization.

My work is three-fold: I will 1) describe how colonialism manifests in mainstream arts, specifically in the portrayal of Asians and Asian Americans in theater and film; 2) build upon the theory of corporeal colonization by analyzing Edward Sakamoto's play *Pilgrimage* and Jay Kuo, Lorenzo Thione, and Marc Acito's musical *Allegiance* and discussing why they are a necessary counter; and 3) connect internment to the current political climate in the U.S. and discuss why Asian American theater continues to be necessary.

CASE STUDIES IN FILM AND THEATER

Asian American theater is inherently political. It provides a counter to the abjection thrust upon Asian Americans by creating opportunities for Asian American actors and allowing them to represent themselves, instead of being confined by common Asian tropes (e.g., the Asian nerd, the martial arts-practicing evil nemesis, the Chinese swordswoman, the sexualized Asian female) (Shimakawa 2002:60; Gomes 2010:168-186; Chung 2011:66). Plays and musicals like *Pilgrimage* and *Allegiance* provide a response to mainstream theatrical hegemony by corporeally *decolonizing* the stage. Casts

consisting almost entirely of Asian American actors reclaim the stage and tell *their* stories. The existence of Asian American bodies alone is groundbreaking, but their bodies do not simply exist. Their bodies engage in acts that demand attention, i.e., they dance, they sing, they make music, and they do it on literal and figurative stages. Emily Roxworthy states that it was mass media (William Randolph Hearst, in particular) and its continual “spectacularization of Japanese suspiciousness” after the bombing of Pearl Harbor that led to a more widespread anti-Japanese American sentiment (2008:17, 101-102). In Asian American theater, Asian Americans provide their own spectacle by being the ones to spectacularize their stories (130-131). Through theater, *they* control the spectacle (ibid.).

Kaye and LeBrecht place theatrical music and sound into the following categories: 1) framing cues, 2) underscoring, 3) transitional sounds and music, and 4) specific cues (which includes required music, spot effects, ambiance, progression of effects, and voiceovers) (2009:22, 27). Their definition of sound design does not address sound critically, but this is not a criticism. It simply is not a part of their definition of sound design: “the creative and technical process resulting in the complete aural environment for live theater” (1). I offer an additional category to Kaye and LeBrecht, that of critical function. The music in *Pilgrimage* and *Allegiance* adheres to the conventions of sound design, but it also serves several critical functions. It contests Asian stereotypes (e.g., passivity, the model minority myth, physical inferiority, etc.), inserts Asian Americans into the U.S. narrative, and breaks the silence associated with the trauma of internment. The music in *Pilgrimage* distinguishes the assimilationist and non-

assimilationist factions formed during Japanese American internment (on- *and* off-stage) (Roxworthy 2008:135). Before I examine how the two productions corporeally *decolonize*, I will discuss how mainstream theater (and film) corporeally colonize Asian and Asian American bodies.

In 1988, a casting team for the musical *Miss Saigon*, composed entirely of white men, began what would turn into a worldwide search for the perfect Kim (Chung 2011:63). The search started in the Western cities of New York, Los Angeles, and Honolulu (and later, Canada), but no one fit the casting team's parameters of "a desirable Asian body, a good voice ... a Western cultural upbringing" and "'a particular Asian sensibility'" (66). Asian Americans were too American and not Asian enough, though too much "Asian-ness" was also undesirable (ibid.). The casting team eventually found its desired blend of East and West in Lea Salonga. Fuller aptly asks, "Who positions whom as the knower and others as the known?" (2010:4). Similarly, I ask, "Who positions whom as the knower of "'Asian sensibility?'" (Fuller 2010:4; Chung 2011:66).

In *Miss Saigon*, Lea Salonga portrays Kim, a Vietnamese woman who falls in love with an American soldier named Chris (*Miss Saigon*, n.d.). The two have a child, Chris leaves Vietnam, and Kim raises her son in Thailand as she awaits Chris' return (ibid.). In the end, Kim commits suicide to give her son a better life in America, with Chris and his American wife Ellen as his new parents (ibid.). The nature of Kim's role is significant and highlights what Western audiences find "palatable" (Mannur 2010:1-24) in terms of the types of characters Asians and Asian Americans can play. Kim is nothing more than a disposable and replaceable sexual commodity (and Vietnam embodied, at the

same time), but Ellen's Anglo skin and middle-class background make her the paragon of motherhood who completes Chris's identity (Chung 2011:70). It is worth noting that Japan was a major economic player in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the period in which the Pacific Rim was dominant (Connery 1994:31) and in which *Miss Saigon* auditions and the premier took place. This is significant because "artistic practices and the larger sociopolitical experience of Asian Americans" are often connected (Fuller 2010:4). In other words, art (e.g., film and theater) reflects "larger social realities," and it provides a space of containment for anything (or anyone) threatening Western dominance (13-14). The experiences of silent film star Sessue Hayakawa (1890-1973) illustrate the use of art as containment in the midst of "larger social realities" (14, 21-23); he rarely performed Japanese roles or appeared in movies about Japan after World War I, when "the social and political climate had shifted to virulent anti-Japanese sentiment" (21-23), a sentiment that continued to exist in World War II. In response to violence against Chinese Americans mistaken for Japanese Americans after Pearl Harbor, *Life* magazine published "How to Tell Japs from Chinese," using physical markers as a basis for distinction (1941). The article was accompanied by facial diagrams and photos contrasting the Chinese "public servant" (i.e., good) with the Japanese "warrior" (i.e., evil), and the "tall" and "lithe" Chinese man with the "short" and "squat" Japanese man (ibid.). *Life* stereotyped Japanese General Hideki Tojo as a "[s]amurai, closer to type of humble Jap than highbred relatives of [the] Imperial Household," while the "peasant Jap" was described as a "squat Mongoloid, with [a] flat, blob nose" (ibid.). Anti-Japanese sentiment was behind a Chinese journalist's decision to wear a badge indicating that he was not Japanese to gain

entry to a White House press briefing (ibid.). *TIME* magazine published a similar article, “How to Tell Your Friends from the Japs,” (1941), and the *Los Angeles Times*, in response to the public outcry for the release of Japanese American internees, stated, “As a race, the Japanese have made for themselves a record for conscienceless treachery unsurpassed in history. Whatever small theoretical advantages there might be in releasing those under restraint in this country would be enormously outweighed by the risks involved” (2017). Today’s social reality is not that much different – white dominion, characterizing entire groups of people as enemies or terrorists, etc. As recently as 2016, the *Los Angeles Times* published several letters from readers who essentially accused the author of an article about national parks (which included the Tule Lake camp) of inflating the severity of internment (Miranda 2016).

I describe Chung’s application of Bascara’s new-capitalism-as-new-imperialism argument to the entertainment industry as a “Pacific Rim mindset,” which continues to drive casting decisions (2011:64); in other words, Western cultivation and use of Asian (human) resources in entertainment has nothing to do with providing authenticity or mutual benefit (even though benefit may occur). Rather, it is simply another way to assert Western superiority, and it deploys the resources of so-called metonymically equivalent allies to bolster the position of the U.S. on the global stage (Connery 1994:32). One of the ways in which this mindset manifests is through a tight grip on Orientalist views of Asian women, with little sign of change in sight (Chung 2011:66). In choosing an “adequately assimilated” (but not too assimilated) Filipina for the lead role of Kim in *Miss Saigon*, the West demonstrated its tacit belief that Filipina/o prosperity (in the form

of abundant “usable” talent) would not exist without Western influence. This is important because the largely-white U.S. film and theater industries control how Asian women are viewed, thus reinforcing stereotypes they helped to create.

In an examination of the “Chinese swordswoman” in the films *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon, Hero*, and *House of Flying Daggers*, Catherine Gomes points to the Orientalist lens through which American film critics analyze such films (2010:168-169). All three films performed well in the U.S. (ibid.). In fact, they were transnationally produced by Chinese, Taiwanese, and Hollywood producers, and at least one film was intended for Western consumption (168, 171). Does this not negate the argument that U.S. audiences are not ready for Asian heroes and heroines? This is not the case. The crucial difference lies in the narrative of home (Kondo 1997:189-209). The Chinese swordswoman *is* at home, distant and contained in a foreign land. Asian Americans have an “ineradicable foreignness,” and, thus, are never granted “home” on- or off-screen in the U.S. (191). Therefore, Hollywood casts Caucasian actresses as Asians and Asian Americans. For example, Emma Stone was cast as part-Chinese Air Force pilot Allison Ng in the film *Aloha* (Robinson 2015), and Scarlett Johansson was cast as Japanese police officer Major Motoko Kusanagi (the character’s name in the Japanese manga and anime versions) in *Ghost in the Shell*, though Johansson simply goes by the name “Major” in the film (Robinson 2017). The transnationally produced films mentioned earlier were clearly intended to take place in Asia, while *Aloha* takes place on U.S. soil (in the state of Hawaii [IMDb, n.d.]) and *Ghost in the Shell* takes place in a neutral (or ambiguous) location. Though *Ghost in the Shell* features a multitude of races and the setting is clearly

Japan-inspired, the film was purposefully set in what has been described as ““an international world,”” rather than Japan (Cheng 2016). The “Chinese swordswoman” is palatable in the U.S. because she is contained within her “native” terrain; she would not receive the same level of acceptance if her story took place on U.S. soil, where she is perpetually an “other” (Mannur 2010:1-24; Kondo 1997:189-209). Asian or Asian Americans are palatable as non-stereotyped central characters on U.S. soil when Caucasian actors portray them (Mannur 2010:1-24). If Asian bodies are corporeally confined to their “homes,” be it in a foreign locale or in peripheral and/or stereotyped roles, their “products of consumption” are acceptable (Mannur 2010:1-24; Kondo 1997:189-209). This is important because film and theater reinforce the binary of us-versus-them (i.e., who belongs in America); “yellow” people, apparently, do not belong in America. Productions such as *Pilgrimage* and *Allegiance* attempt to undo the us-versus-them binary.

SYNOPSIS AND MUSIC

Pilgrimage

Edward Sakamoto’s *Pilgrimage* premiered in 1981 as a part of the East West Players’ Internment Series (Morioka-Steffens 2003:444). (Formed in 1965, East West Players is “the nation’s longest-running professional theater of color and the largest producing theater of Asian American artistic work” [East West Players, n.d.]).

Congressional hearings on internment reparations ended in the same year (1981).

Japanese Americans received an apology and reparations from the U.S. government in 1988, when President Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act. *Pilgrimage*, and other

internment-related plays also making their debut in the 1980s, were forms of activism. *Pilgrimage* is both a mirror and instigator of change (Rosenthal and Flacks 2011:7, 13-15, 19). It mirrors the trauma experienced by Japanese Americans (and how it continues to do so nearly 30 years later) and its effects on subsequent generations of Japanese Americans, and, more alarmingly, it mirrors the racism enforced and propagated by the U.S. government. It reenacts Japanese American activism and coming to political consciousness through the reparations movement. America still has a long way to go. One might view *Pilgrimage*, along with other 1980s-era plays about internment, as an appeal to Congress and non-Japanese Americans (Street, Hague, and Savigny 2008:269-271).

Pilgrimage illustrates the complex and individual nature of trauma and its aftereffects, as well as how those aftereffects manifest in later generations of Japanese Americans. It is the story of three *nisei* interned at Manzanar during WWII – Millie, Victor, and Takeshi – as told by two *sansei*, Ella and Tom, and one *yonsei*, Scott. Ella, Tom, and Scott, who are on a pilgrimage to Manzanar, take the audience back in time to 1973, the year in which Millie, Victor, and Takeshi took their own pilgrimage. Approximately thirty years have passed, and Millie and Victor are now (unhappily) married to each other. They encounter their friend Takeshi who is now a karate instructor in Torrance, California. As the three spend time together, it becomes clear that internment has affected Victor and Takeshi in radically different ways. Victor's path has been precarious; at times, he is staunchly patriotic (and seemingly anti-Japanese), and at other times, he is nostalgic over his pre-internment days as an advanced karate student who had

hoped to pursue further martial arts study in Japan. Takeshi has achieved balance; he served in the U.S. Army *and* embraced his Japanese heritage by traveling to Japan. Takeshi was able to pick up the pieces, so to speak, and return to karate post-internment. Before internment, Takeshi wanted to become a poet and attend UCLA as an English major.

In the first act, Ella, Tom, and Scott exist in the present and tell the story of Millie, Victor, and Takeshi. Ella, Tom, and Scott transport the audience back and forth through time, jumping from 1973 to the 1940s several times throughout the act. The two groups never physically interact with each other, though Ella, Tom, and Scott exist as voices in the heads of Millie, Victor, and Takeshi. In the second act, the lives of both groups gradually conjoin as the actions of the younger group begin to mirror the actions of the older. Time is no longer an obstacle, and the two groups interact directly. Tom and Scott initially experience the same divergence of paths that Takeshi and Victor experienced after internment. Scott insists that he is “not bound by race, heritage, tradition, or stereotype” and that his friends are color blind, but the tale of Victor and Takeshi serves as a cautionary tale (Sakamoto 1981, act 1). Scott realizes that he can be Japanese and American. The conjoining of generations communicates the seemingly endless cycle of racism and assimilation expectations. As the character of Tom states, “There are no sides to this. Only a circle. You’ll see. Only a circle” (ibid.). What Japanese Americans experienced is another part of the cycle. What is the cycle? It is prevailing attitudes about race, citizenship, and structures of power. It could happen again to another group, to the same group, or to people of color in general, which is why this topic still matters. At the

end of *Pilgrimage*, both generations have shown us that the individual has control over how they express their American-ness, despite pressures to assimilate.

Victor is competitive with Takeshi and seems to harbor resentment toward him for living *his* pre-internment dream of becoming a karate instructor. Victor behaves as if he has ownership of that specific dream, and Takeshi stole it from him. It was Victor who wanted to travel to Japan. It was Victor who wanted to become a karate instructor someday. It was Victor who was Takeshi's *sempai* (before internment). Takeshi is the embodiment of a lost dream, motivating Victor to return to karate to recapture it years later. *Pilgrimage* subverts the martial artist/evil nemesis trope by using karate as a positive signifier for Japanese heritage. At the end of the play, "Phorbas is called upon to settle the argument between assimilation into the American mainstream defended by Scott, and separatism based on an awareness of the racism directed towards them by the American mainstream supported by Tom" (Morioka-Steffens 2003:448). In Delphic mythology, Phorbas is a king who attacks pilgrims travelling to Delphi, forcing them to box with him (Fontenrose 1959:24-25). He is eventually defeated by Apollo. Victor fails to defeat Phorbas and experiences a metaphorical death. It is assimilation, denial, and betrayal of his Japanese heritage that "kills" him (Morioka-Steffens 2003:448). Assimilation and denial are represented by his substantially-weakened karate skills after internment (*ibid.*). As far as betrayal, Victor and Takeshi once studied under the same karate *sensei* (who was a father figure to both), and Victor eventually turned him in to the FBI. Takeshi, the stronger practitioner and Apollo's counterpart in this story, triumphs and manages to kill Phorbas by *embracing* his heritage (*ibid.*). I do not define this as a

victory for the separatist front (see Morioka-Steffens quote above). I define it as a statement against the suppression of Japanese language and culture. Japanese Americans understood that cultural displays of Japanese-ness were associated with “the enemy,” so they continued to suppress their heritage after the war out of fear that history would repeat itself (Japanese American National Museum [JANM], n.d.). This is important because the U.S. has long had an assimilate-or-else mindset. Not assimilating makes one un-American. *Pilgrimage*, by way of Takeshi’s triumph, communicates that you do not have to assimilate to be American. The play itself is the intervention.

Music in *Pilgrimage*

A cursory examination of the *Pilgrimage* script shows that music functions as a transitional and underscoring device. Kaye and LeBrecht do not engage with music beyond its use as a theatrical device. *Pilgrimage* is not a musical, but music plays a pivotal role. Beyond serving as a theatrical device, it serves as a representation of the Japanese/American binary and the staunch assimilationist/not-so-staunch assimilationist binary (via starkly disparate music, which ranges from 1940s American popular music to traditional Japanese music). In her book *The Spectacle of Japanese American Trauma*, Emily Roxworthy writes about two internee factions at Manzanar – one assimilationist, the other not – and how performance and political ideology became inseparable (2008:135-136).

While Nisei sympathetic to the WRA’s assimilationist policy enthusiastically participated in the festive U.S. war bond drives and other patriotic displays of Americanization, internees who passionately disagreed with the camp administration broadcast a deepening affinity for their Japanese roots, as the growing commitment to ethnic retention in opposition to enforced

Americanization, by unabashedly performing Japanese cultural practices such as *odori* and singing pro-Japanese anthems (ibid.).

Performances were segregated so that Japanese performances (e.g., *odori*, Kabuki, Noh) and American performances (e.g., magic tricks, tap dancing, popular music) occurred on separate nights (ibid.). The music in *Pilgrimage* similarly reflects the divergent paths and attitudes of the three former internees (Millie, Victor, and Takeshi), as well as how internment shaped the attitudes of subsequent generations of Japanese Americans (represented by Ella, Scott, and Tom). It also highlights the black-and-white rigidity (in other words, no gray area) with which “American-ness” is sometimes defined. It reinforces the actions taking place on stage and reflects the process of decolonization; reminiscent of Fanon, the “violent” back-and-forth quality of the music is a tug-of-war to dismantle and transform existing structures of power and the types of thinking they engender and normalize. It is a tug-of-war to define one’s own existence and to have access to the same privileges their white compatriots enjoy.

One of the first songs to appear in *Pilgrimage* is “You’re a Sap, Mr. Jap.” “You’re a Sap, Mr. Jap” was the title of an overtly anti-Japanese *Popeye* propaganda cartoon from 1942 (IMDb, n.d.),¹ as well as a song written by John Redmond, Nat Simon, and James Cavanaugh (ibid.). During the scene in which the song appears, Tom plays a role within a role, that of a radio or television announcer. He has just signed on when red lights immediately flood the stage, and taiko asserts its musical dominance. Scott hits the drum several times (a “boom” followed by a “BOOM” according to the script [Sakamoto 1981,

¹ A video of the cartoon is available at <http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2mzyap>.

act 1]). Scott continues to play, increasing in tempo. Tom announces that Japan has just attacked Pearl Harbor and moves to stage right to play taiko (stage directions for playing are “furiously” and “thunderous” [ibid.]). Ella makes air raid siren sounds, Tom plays *taiko* from stage right, and then the lights go out. After a brief pause, Ella reappears holding a puppet of Hitler, while Tom reappears holding a puppet of Japanese general Hideki Tojo. He starts singing “You’re a Sap, Mr. Jap” (perhaps foreshadowing Japanese American internment, if the next scene is any indication, and/or retribution against Japan). In the next scene, Victor and Takeshi are in the middle of a conversation about their karate *sensei*, who was picked up by the FBI. Tom and Scott are now holding *hakujin* (white person) puppets and use them to beat up Takeshi, while Ella, also holding a *hakujin* puppet, sings “You’re a Sap, Mr. Jap” in victory. Afterward, Tom, as himself, expresses anger toward Victor who has chosen not to act, berating him for not helping Takeshi and calling him a sell-out (as well as berating him, and presumably Millie and Takeshi, for “allowing” themselves to be interned). It is later revealed later that Victor is the one who turned in his *sensei*. I have included an excerpt from the song (Redmond, Simon, and Cavanaugh 1941):

You're a sap, Mr. Jap, you make a Yankee cranky
You're a sap, Mr. Jap, Uncle Sammy's gonna spanky
Wait and see before we're done
The A, B, C, and D will sink your rising sun
You're a sap, Mr. Jap, you don't know Uncle Sammy
When he fights for his rights, you'll take it on the lammy
For he'll wipe the Axis right off the map
You're a sap, sap, sap, Mr. Jap

At this point in the play, the U.S. is in control, and Takeshi (a stand-in for Japanese Americans, and perhaps also for Japanese), has been defeated.

In a flashback to his time as a U.S. soldier, Takeshi listens to “I’ll Be with You in Apple Blossom Time” on the radio. Many artists recorded the song, but The Andrews Sisters recorded the song during WWII (1941)² and were known for supporting the U.S. war effort (Berkvist 2013). They entertained troops abroad, encouraged people to buy war bonds, etc. (ibid.). After the song, Scott plays taiko, and Tom enters the stage as a member of the Japanese military who yells at Takeshi for fighting for the U.S. His logic is that Takeshi should be fighting for Japan since he looks Japanese. Takeshi is an American, but his loyalty to the U.S. (and Japan) is in question due to his Japanese heritage. The music reflects this; just as taiko appears directly after “I’ll Be with You in Apple Blossom Time,” the matter of his Asian appearance and heritage is never too far from people’s minds. Afterward, Ella and Scott sing an unnamed Japanese military song and “The Caisson Song,” respectively, as literal opposition plays out on stage. Ella emerges from one side of the stage singing the Japanese song and holding a Japanese flag (and the General Tojo puppet), and Scott emerges from the other side singing “The Caisson Song” and holding an American flag (and a puppet of American General Douglas MacArthur), raising the question of why the two sides must continue to be in opposition, especially now that the war is over. Why must a binary be established? Why must one be forced to choose a side? In a simulated camp scene, Ella, Tom, and Scott (as internees) sing “Don’t Fence Me In” and are being told that they can prove their loyalty

² A recording of the song is available at <https://youtu.be/c4gyB-IWU00>.

by fighting for the U.S. Bing Crosby and The Andrews Sisters recorded the song in 1944.³ The three characters (as internees) join the U.S. war effort, defeat Hitler, and sing “When Johnnie Comes Marching Home” in victory. They appear to have chosen the side of assimilation.

In addition to taiko, the characters also play shakuhachi and kabuki clappers. In Act 1, for example, taiko is played before each internee is introduced and during war simulation scenes, illustrating the conflation of Japanese Americans and the Japanese enemy, and taiko and kabuki clappers are played before the Manzanar pilgrimage (an indication of heritage and Japanese stereotypes). In Act 2, shakuhachi is played before Ella, Tom, and Scott’s trip to Manzanar to do maintenance and honor the dead, and taiko is played during karate scenes and during the last fight with Phorbas. What does it mean that shakuhachi and taiko end the play? They are heard shortly after Takeshi’s triumph in the end. As with his triumph, the music communicates that “American-ness” need not be a matter of assimilation versus separatism. One can claim “American-ness” *and* “Japanese-ness.” In toppling the U.S. racial hierarchy, decolonization begins with the undoing of mindsets that oppose this.

Rosenthal and Flacks talk about the role of music in mobilizing social movements; music may not directly inspire people to act, but it can energize them and induce a frame of mind that might make them more prepared to act (2016:172-179). The songs of Simon Bikindi (referred to as “Rwanda’s Michael Jackson”) allegedly incited the genocide of hundreds of thousands of Tutsis, a minority population in Rwanda

³ A recording of the song is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRSjUY5_IG4.

(McNeil 2002). The Hutu majority allegedly sang Bikindi's songs before slaughtering them (ibid.). What about music without lyrics (Rosenthal and Flacks 2016:174)?

Pilgrimage includes music with and without lyrics. The music without lyrics in *Pilgrimage* includes taiko, shakuhachi, and kabuki clappers. The inclusion of taiko in a play about Japanese Americans and internment is no accident. North American *taiko* is not only rooted in political activism, but the act of playing taiko is, itself, an act of political participation (Wong 2004:198; Street, Hague, and Savigny 2008; JANM, n.d.).

Taken up by *sansei* during the Asian American movement, taiko was the ideal vehicle for breaking the cycle of silence and openly reclaiming Japanese/American heritage (JANM, n.d.). The sounds created by striking the drum and the physical and vocal elements employed during taiko performance were inherently political, mobilizing performers and audience members alike (Wong 2000:75-77; 2004:198). Taiko and silence are antithetical to each other. Taiko involves *kakegoe* (shouting), and the physical motions necessary for creating its powerful sounds inevitably require a greater occupation of physical space (Wong 2000:75-77). All of this served (and continues to serve) as a reminder to Japanese Americans and others that political movements often require "making noise" and being noticed (ibid.). It is an act of defiance for women (Japanese American and otherwise) who refuse to be bound by gender roles marked by a lack of strength, silence, and submission (Wong 2000:73-74). It is an act of defiance for Asian American men who refuse to be bound by emasculating Asian American male stereotypes (ibid.). Taiko originated as a form of protest, but it also served as the "solution music" Rosenthal and Flacks speak of when they say that music "suggests concrete changes" (2016:175).

Internment may have scared Japanese Americans into assimilation and silence, but taiko was a part of the solution in that it motivated people to “make noise,” to speak out (Wong 2000:75-77; 2004:198).

In *Pilgrimage*, taiko seems to incite metaphorical battles (assimilation and abandonment of heritage versus the embracing of heritage). At the very least it aids in creating the right frame of mind in the same way that taiko was traditionally used to motivate Japanese military forces during war (Bender 2012:34). Along with karate, it is also a stand-in for Japanese heritage. Its association with war is apropos; decolonization is an ugly, messy, and violent process (whether internal or external), and the action and music in *Pilgrimage* work in tandem to reflect this. The disparate, tug-of-war nature of the music reflects resistance on both sides; those who hold power in the U.S. are unwilling to change a system that grants them power and privilege, and those who hope for transformation are tired of being suppressed.

Allegiance

The online world knows George Takei as a prolific purveyor of humor on social media. He has over two million followers on Twitter and over nine million followers on Facebook. Raising awareness about Japanese American internment has long been his goal, but because he felt people knew very little about it he chose to be strategic in drawing attention to his cause (“George Takei Talks New Broadway Musical *Allegiance* on ‘Today,’” n.d.). He concentrated on growing his fan base, first through science fiction and then through humor, and gradually injected history and politics into his social media posts (ibid.). This paved the way for widespread interest in his musical *Allegiance*.

Allegiance debuted at the Old Globe Theater in San Diego in 2012, and it enjoyed a fourteen-week run on Broadway from November 8, 2015 to February 14, 2016, and it was broadcast twice in select movie theaters across the U.S in December 2016, February 2017, and December 2017.

Jay Kuo, Lorenzo Thione, and Marc Acito's *Allegiance* is based on George Takei's childhood experiences as an internee at Rohwer Relocation Center in Arkansas during World War II (ibid.), though *Allegiance* takes place at Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Park County, Wyoming. Most of the musical is a flashback. In the beginning, Sam (Sammy) Kimura (portrayed by Takei) is at home and dressed in his Army uniform, having just returned from a Pearl Harbor anniversary ceremony. A woman knocks on the door and tells him that his older sister Kei has passed away and that she is the conservator of her estate. Sammy wants nothing to do with his sister, but the audience does not yet know why. It is during this scene that the audience is transported back in time. Sammy (now portrayed by Telly Leung) has just graduated from college and has returned home to Salinas, California to celebrate *obon* with his family (his father Tatsuo, his older sister Kei, and *ojii-san* [grandfather] [also portrayed by Takei] and friends. The contentious nature of Tatsuo and Sammy's relationship is established right away; Tatsuo appears to be disappointed that Sammy did not earn the grades necessary for law school admission. Kei did not go to college, instead taking on a maternal role in the absence of her mother (who passed away) and raising Sammy. Shortly after *obon*, the family is ordered to relocate to Heart Mountain, where internees are under constant military scrutiny. They cannot display Japanese items or engage in Japanese activities, they have no privacy

(even in bathroom facilities), and they make beds out of hay-filled sacks. This is important because the characters embody the conflicts, inner struggle, pain, and racism that binaries, and hierarchies based on them, engender. The lack of proper bedding, for example, is a display of Fanon's colonization/dehumanization process. Corporeal colonization exists in many forms – via camps, via the film and theater industries, etc. – thus demonstrating the necessity of corporeal *decolonization*.

Allegiance takes a turn for the worse at the camp dance, when Frankie attempts to rally internees against the signing of a government “loyalty questionnaire.” Disagreement over answering Questions 27 and 28 on the loyalty questionnaire (about joining the armed forces and swearing loyalty to the U.S.) leads to the formation of two factions – pro-enlistment and anti-enlistment, led by Sammy and Frankie respectively. Tatsuo is sent to Tule Lake for answering no to Questions 27 and 28 on the loyalty questionnaire, and Frankie is imprisoned. Throughout *Allegiance*, Mike Masaoka, leader of the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL), is seen advocating on behalf of Japanese Americans, though he is painted as somewhat of a villain. Sammy becomes a war hero, Tatsuo is released from Tule Lake, and Kei and Frankie marry (and have a child). Sammy visits Kei, but he quickly leaves after learning that she married Frankie and that his father accepts Frankie as a son. Feeling betrayed, Sammy storms off and never sees Kei again. The audience is transported back to the present, and Sammy finally lets go of decades of resentment toward his family. He attends Kei's funeral and learns that the woman who knocked on his door in the first scene is his niece, Kei's daughter Hanako. Sam is overwhelmed with emotion and re-establishes a relationship with his family through

Hanako. *Allegiance* is important because the existence of Asian American bodies (and more than this, a cast consisting almost entirely of Asian Americans) on a literal and figurative stage normally dominated by white bodies demonstrates the concept of corporeal decolonization. *Allegiance*, like *Pilgrimage*, is a play about choices. One can travel the path of assimilation or the path of resistance. Sammy embodies assimilation. He decides to join the U.S. military to prove that he is an American and staunchly opposes Frankie for his resistance. Sammy ultimately abandons his family over the sense of betrayal he feels because of Hannah's death and what he perceives as his family's betrayal for choosing resistance, though his government betrayed him by interning him and the freedom to choose is supposed to be what is truly emblematic of the U.S. Frankie embodies resistance. He refuses to be forced to prove his loyalty to the U.S. and is offended that his loyalty is being questioned simply because of his heritage. And then there is the character of Hannah who faces a choice of her own – continue to live life comfortably as she has or stand up and challenge Western constructs, potentially at the risk of her own life.

A common tension in Asian American theater, according to Shimakawa, is the truthful portrayal of Asian Americans and the desire for fame (Shimakawa 2002:62). What about *Allegiance*'s "truth?" Is it less successful in its political aims because it takes liberties? *Pilgrimage* is also fiction. What about it? What is a truthful portrayal? For former Heart Mountain internee Frank Abe, *Allegiance*'s "inexactness" is not an issue; what is problematic, he says, are the fabricated details that never would have occurred in the real world (2015). In a later article, Abe specifically takes issue with internee beatings

and the hunting of resistance leaders (2017). Jonathan Mandell of *DC Theater Sense* opines that most theatergoers would dismiss Abe's critiques (2015), but later writes

The problem of authenticity pops up in a different way. *Allegiance* too often feels as if the creative team were working from a Broadway musical checklist: Here's your romance, your soaring Broadway ballad, your lively dance number, your comic relief, your Les Miz grimness, your climactic moment of violence. The foreground plot involving Sammy's relationship with Hannah the white nurse in the camp (Katie Rose Clark), and his complicated relationship with his sister and with her love interest Frankie, is not just unlikely; it sucks up far more attention than it deserves. It doesn't seem an honest reflection of an egregious moment in history created by fear and bigotry. Rather, it feels imposed by producers motivated by a different fear – that they can't otherwise bring in a Broadway audience (ibid.).

Mandell's statement is not without merit. *Allegiance* seems to have been intended for mainstream consumption (the official website contains the tagline "Allegiance – A Story of Factual History Blended with the Dream of Romance" ["Fact or Fiction: Behind Our Story," n.d.], and this means that its directionality and intended audience is significantly different from that of *Pilgrimage*, which was written for East West audiences. Internment is a delicate topic and perhaps one that may not have been effective if "handled" a certain way (i.e., in a way that addressed internment right away, in a more direct manner, etc.) Takei avoided this by first building a fan base through social media and slowly incorporated history and politics (e.g., gay marriage, internment) into his postings. He also seems to have anticipated blowback from *Allegiance*'s version of events having included a section entitled "Fact or Fiction: Behind Our Story" on the production's official website. The section includes information from Densho, an organization

dedicated to preserving and sharing information about Japanese American internment.⁴ In addition, the *Allegiance* website has a section devoted to resources for teachers (“Resources for Educators,” n.d.). In a post-broadcast interview, a member of the behind-the-scenes crew says that America has not been ready to hear about internment until now (Fathom Events 2016). America has a history of avoiding aspects of history. It took decades before the original Japanese version of *Godzilla* played in U.S. theaters; the original version directly addresses the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Ryfle 2005). Ethnic studies, an area of study that San Francisco State and Berkeley students fought for during the 1960s, has been banned in Arizona K-12 schools because people are under the impression that talking about racism is racist (Polletta and Rau 2017). Legislators tried to extend the ban to universities but were unsuccessful (ibid.). Having said all this, I completely disagree with Mandell’s critique of the foregrounding of Hannah and Sammy’s relationship. I counter that Hannah’s role (and journey) is crucial (and it is not because she is some sort of “white savior”). Hannah is a conduit through which audience members (i.e., white spectators) will hopefully come to similar realizations about race in the U.S. The importance of her role as a conduit is demonstrated in the solo ballad “Should I.” (This will be discussed in the next section).

Brian Niiya makes excellent arguments (2017) for and against *Allegiance*. He acknowledges that a mostly Asian American cast is significant. He understands that *Allegiance* is a fictional retelling, but questions why Takei, who is obviously familiar with the history, would exaggerate camp conditions – conditions that Abe argues make

⁴ See <http://www.densho.org>.

Heart Mountain look like a German POW camp (e.g., loud speakers, having to disrobe upon arrival to the camps, being put in handcuffs for answering no to Questions 27 and 28 on the loyalty questionnaire). He is concerned that audiences will use exaggerated details to justify internment. Changes were made in response to some of the criticisms after the 2012 San Diego premiere (Niiya 2017). The portrayal of Mike Masaoka changed; he went from being more villainous to less villainous, and he no longer danced and sang (ibid.). *Allegiance*'s previous ending had more to do with Sam's politics and his views on the JACL than ending his estrangement from his family (ibid.). Is the overall message enough to look past the inaccuracies? In his article "Ethnomusicology, Folklore, and History in the Filmmaker's Art," Victor Sorell writes that the film *The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez* "admittedly takes liberties here and there with factual information, but it always stops far short of distortion and exaggeration" (1983:155). Does *Allegiance* distort the truth to the point that the play is no longer useful? In response, Niiya suggests that it depends on your tolerance for things like this (2017). I maintain that *Allegiance* is more positive than negative. The politics of *Allegiance* go beyond historical details. Its mostly-Asian American cast is a response to whitewashing in mainstream theater, common Asian American stereotypes, and the argument of who gets to claim American-ness. It is still activism, and it is needed.⁵

MUSIC IN ALLEGIANCE

One of the great ironies of the Japanese American story is that a lot of people were ashamed to talk about what had happened. They didn't bring it up with their children. They didn't tell the story and I felt like, well we aren't just going to tell

⁵ See <http://www.densho.org/allegiance-see-film-watch-historical-inaccuracies/> for a discussion of *Allegiance*'s historical inaccuracies.

it, we are going to sing it and perform it and release all of those emotions that are so difficult to speak but once you give them a voice in a song the emotions can come through the music. So that is why I said, it's gotta be a musical (Hertvik 2016).

This was lyricist and composer Jay Kuo's response when asked about the decision to turn *Allegiance* into a musical, rather than a play or a book. Music, he said, can "reach the depth of the human condition" in a way "that mere words cannot" (ibid.). The decision to tell a story about Japanese American internment on a literal *and* figurative stage, and the incorporation of music to reach the depths of the story, was a political one. *Allegiance* did not simply subvert silence; it countered it with "shouting" (Wong 2000:76). In this sense, it has much in common with *Pilgrimage* (i.e., the use of taiko – not just any drum, but a very loud one with far-reaching reverberating power). Regarding the incorporation of Japanese elements into the music, Kuo felt obligated to include elements of authenticity ("hints and flavors of Japan") (Hertvik 2016). I am certain that his musical choices have implications beyond an indication of heritage; the use of Japanese music is a reminder of Japanese Americans' permanent alien status in the U.S. Clearly, the combination of "traditional" Japanese music and Western music was not an arbitrary decision, but it communicates much more than Kuo realizes. What is Western and what is Japanese is always clear musically. A line is drawn through music. A rigid binary is established.

In the song "Allegiance," Tatsuo wrestles with how he should answer questions 27 and 28 on the loyalty questionnaire and where his allegiance should lie (his family versus the U.S.). Tatsuo's internal battle is juxtaposed with Sammy's own battle over

joining the military. Sammy attempts to convince him to appease the U.S. government and answer both questions in the affirmative to avoid deportation or worse. But Tatsuo decides that his allegiance must first lie with himself, that the best he can do for himself and his family is to listen to his own conscience. He is sent to Tule Lake as a result. The way that Japanese instruments (or instruments that suggest them) weave in and out of the main composition points to Tatsuo's confusion about what course of action to take as he considers the consequences of both sides. It also reinforces the juxtaposition occurring in the song between Tatsuo and Sammy (and later Kei). By the end of the song, Tatsuo chooses to resist the U.S. government's efforts to force a declaration of allegiance. His decision is more a question of what choice will allow him to live with himself and less a question of allegiance to a nation. Since Tatsuo exists in a world where rigid binaries rule, it is fitting that a Japanese instrument would end the song since his decision would be interpreted as disloyalty to the U.S. and loyalty to the enemy. Its use could signify how the government views Tatsuo after his decision (i.e., as an enemy), but it also signifies resistance. Despite the optics of his choice, he chooses neither side. Instead, he chooses his conscience, and in the battle for decolonization, that is the triumph regardless of how he is affected corporeally. I have included selected lyrics from "Allegiance" (Kuo 2015) below:

Tatsuo:
We look like enemy
They see disloyal
Let them accuse me or deport me if they wish
They talk of liberty
All empty words
They promise justice for our people

Look around
We are dead upon the ground
Look around

Should my allegiance lie
First with my family?

If I refuse to bow
Will I harm them instead?

Tatsuo and Sammy:
If I go through with this

Tatsuo, Sammy, and Kei:
I may never see them again!

Tatsuo:
Someday you'll understand
The path I've chosen
Today
I answer "no" and "no"
To set my conscience free
My allegiance must lie first
With me

“Our Time Now” and “Resist” feature a collective resistance. “Our Time Now” features different cast members who sing about how they will face their current circumstances. At the end of the song, a chorus shouts “Freedom,” repeating it four times, though the featured singers (Sammy, Frankie, Kei, and Hannah) and Mike Masaoka, in a spoken part, have very different ideas about how to enact that freedom. At the end of “Resist,” a chorus shouts “Resist! And fight!” several times. Sammy’s lyric “We must defend life and liberty by any means necessary” brings to mind the supposed “military necessity” (Nakagawa 2017) of internment and points to his assimilation. Selected lyrics from “Resist” (Kuo 2015) are below:

Sammy:
I'm a regular guy, just a Yankee G.I
Who's fighting for his country
See soldiers like me, want our families free
Mine's at Heart Mountain Camp

We condemn agitators
like Frank Suzuki, and his followers
They are cowards and traitors
They must be punished
We must defend life and liberty
by any means necessary

Company:
Resist
And fight
Resist
And fight
Resist

It is during “Resist” that Tatsuo is freed from Tule Lake, thanks to Sammy who is now a war hero featured on the cover of *Life* magazine, the same magazine that published “How to Tell Japs from the Chinese.” Japanese instruments mark Tatsuo’s appearance during the song, which points to the fact that he is still considered an “agitator” despite his release.

In her solo “Should I,” Hannah sings about “rules” (“common sense” thinking that is a result of binaries) and contemplates breaking them. I have included the complete lyrics (Kuo 2015) below:

There's a line between should and shouldn't
And I never have crossed it
Tried to hold myself back, but I couldn't
I used to have judgement
How could I have lost it?
I've been willfully playing with fire
Now it's drawing me in

With no net, and walking on wire
How could I let him sink under my skin?

But the rule is stay far from him
Still my heart skips a beat
Life in here may be sink or swim
But he makes it strangely sweet

There's a line between should and shouldn't
But it's starting to vanish
If I could let this go, I wouldn't
No one can tell me which feelings to banish
Rules are rules
They always apply
I follow the rules
But should I?
Should I?

Rules are rules
But I don't know why
I follow the rules
I follow the rules
But should I?
Should I?
Should I?
Should I?

This is not just a love song. It is Hannah's awakening. It is when she finally questions the binaries that have always been a part of her worldview (e.g., us versus them, "us" being white America and "them" being people of color). It is also when she begins to recognize Sammy's (i.e., Japanese Americans') humanity. In questioning her own beliefs and their veracity, she opens herself up to a new worldview, one not rooted in binaries. The song is an attempt to guide people to an antidote of sorts, in a manner that is, hopefully, more palatable to audiences (Mannur 2010:1-24). This song tells us what we

(Western society) must do (question your beliefs and why you have them) in a language that is familiar and more “palatable” (ibid.).

After Hannah’s internal struggle (indicated in the lyrics of “Should I?”), Hannah ultimately decides to remove the boundary, as indicated in the lyrics to “Stronger Than Before” (below are selected lyrics only) (Kuo 2015). The characters of Kei and Hannah sing:

Kei:

You don't understand us
Or what they put us through
This is no concern of yours
I'll do what I must do

Years inside here taught me
The world won't set things right
It's up to us to save ourselves
I'm ready for the fight

Hannah:

You won't do this alone now
I know where I belong
You've always stood for what was right
While I stood for what's wrong

When I stepped into this prison
Who knew what lay ahead
I thought I faced the enemy
But I fell in love instead

I am stronger than before
Braver than before
I swear I'll stand beside you
To even out the score

Both:

After all that's happened here we cannot pretend
That we are bound together
We will see this to the end

To the end

George Lipsitz states that there are “too many accounts of whites acting with unctuous paternalism ... [and] very few stories about white people opposing white supremacy on their own (2006: loc 130 [Kindle version]). I call the role of Hanna crucial because she is what Lipsitz describes: the only “white [person] opposing white supremacy on [her] own” at Heart Mountain. She is a conduit through which white spectators might see themselves. At the same time that *Allegiance*'s use of Western and Japanese music establishes binaries, the instances in which Western and Japanese music weave in and out of each other during a single song is a message that binaries are not (and do not have to be) reality. We do not have to live or think in such an oppositional manner. We do not have to place boundaries or adhere to a single category. The music sends the message that you cannot generalize a group of people in an us-versus-them manner. People are complex; they have multiple identities. Us-versus-them, white-versus-black (or brown, yellow, etc.) does not reflect the U.S.' present reality (nor did it ever). The binaries that dominate our thinking (and government policies) are merely thoughts that people have been conditioned to believe. The reality is that many “colors,” so to speak, encompass “us.” We create and place boundaries, but reality shows that people are not so simply categorized. Perhaps music, theater, and other expressive arts can, at the very least, inspire one person to think beyond boundaries.

CONCLUSION

Why do musicals and plays like *Allegiance* and *Pilgrimage* matter? What do they have to with today? How are they connected to the current political climate in the U.S.?

The U.S. interned over 100,000 Japanese Americans because they looked like “the enemy.” President Trump has banned U.S. entry for people (with no connection to the U.S.) from Iran, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, and Chad because they not only look like “the enemy,” but they practice the same religion as “the enemy.” In response to one of several iterations of the ban, a federal appellate judge invoked *Korematsu v. United States* by comparing Trump’s Muslim ban to *Korematsu* (which upheld Japanese American internment during WWII) (Johnson 2017). The Justice Department admitted knowing that very few Japanese Americans posed a threat and that they were already aware of the “most dangerous” or had them in custody (2011), and a report written by General John DeWitt said “no military necessity” existed for internment (Nakagawa 2017). *Korematsu* still has not been overturned (Williams and Yaffe 2017). On April 29, 2017, I went on my first pilgrimage to Manzanar. Members of the Council for Islamic-American Relations (CAIR) were present. They went to Manzanar because they believed that Executive Order 9066 (which called for Japanese American internment) affects their community, too, and draw parallels to Executive Order 13769, which would ban people from seven Muslim countries from entering the U.S. (Nakagawa 2017). Warren Furutani, the keynote speaker at the 2017 Manzanar pilgrimage and rally, said that Trump has signed “more executive orders in his first 100 days than any other president in United State history” (ibid.). A president signs executive orders to bypass the legislative branch (ibid.). Furutani said in his speech, “[Korematsu] sits around like a loaded gun, a loaded gun aimed [at] whoever is being scapegoated ...” (ibid.) Alan Nishio (born at Manzanar) was presented with an award and said we must “... move from remembrance to resistance

... either we reaffirm democracy and civil liberties and the rights of all or we turn our back to that and turn to fascism and demagoguery” (ibid.). On April 26, 2017 (three days before the annual Manzanar Pilgrimage), Trump issued an executive order for the National Park Service “to review the designation of national monuments under the Antiquities Act” (Manzanar will be not affected because it was ““congressionally delegated”) (ibid.). But what will happen to other camps designated as national sites, e.g., Minidoka? Trump says that the Antiquities Act is an abuse of power, and that he wants to ““return control to the people”” (Eilperin 2017). I see this as just another indication of the U.S. trying to separate itself from its racist and violent history. It may have nothing to do with that, but it is very interesting in light of the U.S.’ record of ignoring aspects of history such as the colonization of Native American land, the colonization of Mexican land, the colonization of Hawaii, etc. He also refuses to denounce recent incidents of white supremacist activity. I am fully aware that music and theater alone will not solve racism and white supremacy, and I acknowledge that I am a part of the problem since I benefit from a system built upon Western binaries. This thesis, however, is an attempt to divest myself of white supremacy (Lipsitz 2006: loc 29 [Kindle version]). And it is an attempt to demonstrate that music and theater, at the very least, can serve as a step toward what will hopefully be real transformation of a system entrenched in racism, though this will take time. The December 2016 movie theater broadcast of *Allegiance* was the highest-grossing music event for Fathom Events, but this did not equate to profit (Hershberg 2017). Producers are still trying to recoup the costs of bringing the musical to Broadway through additional theater screenings and other events (ibid.). While

Allegiance was successful in that the broadcast allowed a wider audience to see it and learn about internment, it was not a financial success overall (ibid.). No matter how you “package” Japanese American internment, I can only assume that people are not ready to watch any type of theater that implicates the U.S. government in the incarceration of its own citizens. And in the era of Trump, it confronts audiences with the fact that the U.S. is not in a post-racial state and has not truly changed since its colonial days. Corporeal harm and suppression based on phenotype continue to be fixtures in daily life. One of the more visible ways in which contemporary colonialism manifests is in film and theater. Current casting practices continue to necessitate that Asian Americans carve out their own spaces, and Asian American theater addresses this need. Plays and musicals like *Pilgrimage* and *Allegiance* provide a response to mainstream theatrical hegemony by corporeally decolonizing the stage. They provide a counter to the erasure Asian American actors encounter in the theater industry.

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