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NISEI THEATER: HISTORY, CONTEXT, AND PERSPECTIVE

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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* * * * *

The Ohio State University

1996

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the heretofore unexamined subject of theater at the Japanese American Relocation Camps of World War Two. Using camp newspapers, interviews with internees, and the limited information about theater (or the arts in general) available from the numerous histories of the internments and oral narratives, this study looks at the Nisei (second generation American citizens of Japanese descent) theater groups which existed at nearly all of the ten camps, and specifically investigates the theatrical practices at six camps: Gila River, Granada, Heart Mountain, Poston, Topaz, and Tule Lake. Productions are described with as much detail as possible and information about resources, acting, and performance space is offered when available.

A brief history of the internments is offered to frame the entire discussion and to place the phenomenon of Nisei theater within the unique context of the internment camps. Two distinct types of Nisei theater are identified: High School and Barrack. Both varieties are defined and exemplified by one or more of the camps discussed. For example, the chapter on Heart Mountain identifies that camp as the quintessential High School theater venue. The chapter on Tule Lake, however, stresses its importance as Barrack theater. Tule Lake becomes the focus of this study since it distinguished itself theatrically and historically. Among the largest of the camps, Tule Lake also had the most extensive and successful repertory. Started, administered, and operated almost
exclusively by Nisei internees, the Tule Lake Little Theater became not only an outlet for
cultural advancement, but also a pulpit for the frustrations of a populace incarcerated
against its will and for no feasible security reason. I contend that the Little Theater’s
purposeful decision to produce Western one-act plays is paradigmatic of the internees’
need to demonstrate an American birthright denied them by their internment. Utilizing
theories of cultural interpretation as well as textual analysis and studies of folk drama,
audience, performance, and venue, I analyze not only the plays produced (a number of
which contain apt metaphors for the conditions of confinement) but also the connections
between text, performers, and spectators and how the specific milieu of an internment
camp significantly modified those relationships.

Following the six descriptive chapters providing the existing empirical evidence,
Nisei theater is examined from a theoretical point of view. This study attempts to place
Nisei theater within the larger context of theater and asks fundamental questions
regarding the nature of ritual, theater, performance, spectatorship, and venue. Using the
work of Victor Turner, the case is made that Nisei theater is a liminal (rather than
liminoid) phenomenon, although it possesses a transitional quality which suggests the
liminoid. Furthermore, Nisei theater is explored as a phenomenon of socially conscious
art, and the argument is made that this unique form of theater is a fine example of this
artform. Ironically, this variety of socially conscious art embraces rather than debunks
the status quo, but the level of social consciousness which characterizes contemporary
theater is equally present in Nisei theater.
Ultimately, this study looks at the various contexts into which one might place the phenomenon of Nisei theater. It is determined that it retains its distinctiveness no matter what context it is put into. This is surely due in part to the uniqueness of the historical realities which created the internment camps themselves.
To Sandra, Matthew, GW, and Q
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In a radio appearance on the syndicated Don Imus Show, Senator Alphonse D'Amato (R-New York) caused a furor by employing a mock Japanese accent to imitate Judge Lance Ito, then presiding over the O.J. Simpson murder trial in Los Angeles. D'Amato's halting delivery of a pidgin English, along with the condescending "little Judge Ito," was swiftly denounced by prominent Japanese-Americans (and others) as racist. Cyril Nishimoto, director of Japanese-American Social Services, remarked, "This inability to distinguish between Japanese and Americans of Japanese ancestry is exactly the kind of attitude that put Japanese-Americans in concentration camps during World War Two." Representative Norman Mineta (D-California) personalized D'Amato's attack: "I don't know what we, as Americans of Japanese ancestry, have to do to be able to prove we are Americans" (Chicago Tribune, April 6, 1995). D'Amato quickly apologized on the floor of the Senate.

D'Amato's theatrics, and the response to them by Nishimoto and Mineta, revived the memory of an unprecedented event in American history: the internment by the United States government of more than 100,000 people of Japanese descent from 1942 through 1945. Of this group, approximately 80,000 were Nisei-second-generation Americans of Japanese descent, who, because of the United States doctrine of jus soli, were granted
citizenship at birth. Thus, by August of 1942 when all persons of Japanese descent regardless of country of birth were moved from the West Coast states of California, Oregon, and Washington to Assembly Centers and, later, one of ten Relocation Camps, the United States government effectively interned a great many of its own citizens. Also interned were some 20,000 Issei (first-generation Japanese) who, because of various Exclusion Acts aimed at the “Yellow Peril,” were prohibited from obtaining citizenship in America (although some did not seek citizenship).

Interest in the internments has covered a wide range of topics with studies of the empirical evidence and oral histories making up the bulk of available scholarship. Full length histories of the internments appeared soon after the closing of the relocation camps in 1945. Among the first was *The Spoilage* by Dorothy Swaine Thomas and Richard S. Nishimoto (1946), a study of camp history and life within the camps undertaken by a team of social scientists (many of whom were themselves interned). Supplementing this work was Thomas' *The Salvage* (1952) which chronicles the fortunes of those released from the camps and returned to American society. *Prejudice, War and the Constitution* (1954), a companion volume to the Thomas studies by Jacobus ten Broek, Edward N. Barnhart, and Floyd W. Matson, explores the social/political/cultural divides which led to the forced evacuation and internment of American citizens.1 Since the publication of these studies, a number of histories have appeared including Audrie Girdner's *The Great Betrayal* (1969), *Impounded People* (1969; a study conducted by the War Relocation Authority, the governing body of the relocation camps), *Japanese Americans and World War II* by Donald Teruo Hata (1974;
1995), Michi Weglyn’s Years of Infamy: The Untold Story of America’s Concentration Camps (1976), and Daniel S. Davis’ Behind Barbed Wire (1982). By far the most prolific scholar on the subject (as well as the general history of Asian American relations) is Roger Daniels who has thoroughly investigated the internments in a number of books, including his nine-volume American Concentration Camps: A Documentary History of the Relocation and Incarceration of Japanese Americans, 1942-45 (1989), which traces the history of the internments through government archives. In addition, Daniels’ Prisoners Without Trial (1993) offers a concise and readable history of the evacuation and resettlements, including the issue of redress, the lump sum of $20,000 paid to each surviving internee.

Oral narrative studies—the voices of the internees (and others)—also dominate the available scholarship. Voices Long Silent: An Oral Inquiry Into the Japanese American Evacuation (1974) by Arthur A. Hansen and Betty E. Mitson has led the way to the more ambitious Japanese American World War II Evacuation Oral History Project (1991), edited by Hansen and including the voices of internees, administrators, and others. John Tateishi’s And Justice For All: An Oral History of the Japanese American Detention Camps (1984), Voices From the Camps (1994) by Larry Dane Brimner, and Face of the Enemy, Heart of a Patriot (1995) by Anne Koto Hayashi all continue the trend of giving voice to those interned, a particularly valuable endeavor given the advancing age of camp colonists and the danger of fading memory. One recent study, Inside an American Concentration Camp (1995), edited by Lane Ryo Hirabayashi, offers the writings of Richard Nishimoto who was interned at Poston and worked as a field researcher for
Dorothy S. Thomas (Nishimoto is listed as co-author of the aforementioned *The Spoilage*).

The present scholarship has well covered the factual history of the internments in a rather broad sense, but there has been limited work done on the everyday lives of the internees beyond the basic necessities of food, shelter, and hygiene. We know from empirical reconstructions how the internees were rounded up, sent by train to relocation centers, told to eat rations only at certain times during the day, and forced to use a communal latrine in prefabricated army barracks. We also know from oral histories how individual internees felt about their predicament and to some extent what was done on an individual basis to combat boredom, resentment, and bitterness. But little has been said of internment camp culture—particularly in terms of the arts—which developed at every camp. Despite the appearance of the merger of two discordant social entities—"culture" and "internment camps"—the fact is that a unique internment camp culture did exist which included many cultural patterns and/or traditions brought into camp from the “outside,” as well as new forms of endeavors developed solely for and because of the conditions of confinement. The incarceration of both first generation aliens and second generation Americans (who made up the majority of colonists, but not necessarily the majority of camp officers), as well as the Caucasian staff, created a unique blend of cultural patterns which led to the development of a unique internment camp culture.

Clifford Geertz’s work, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), sheds light from a cultural anthropological point of view on the reason why such an internment camp culture might have evolved. According to Geertz, culture is best seen as a set of control
mechanisms utilized to control behavior: "[m]an is precisely the animal most desperately dependent upon such extragenetic, outside-the-skin control mechanisms... for ordering his behavior" (44). Without such controls, Geertz contends, human actions would be ungovernable. Thus, the internees had a stake in the development of a cultural system in order to stabilize the sudden and chaotic uprooting in which they found themselves. Similarly, the governing body of the camps—the War Relocation Authority (WRA), also had a stake in internment camp culture, and indeed became an active part of it, as a means to maintain control over a people who as a whole knew that they had been treated with gross unfairness. Under the guise of "self-governance," the WRA encouraged internees to make life at camp as normal as possible—a task all parties must have known to be difficult given the barbed wire and guard towers which surrounded every camp.

As limited as studies of camp culture in general are, studies of specific artistic practices are limited further. One recent offering, Deborah Gesensway and Mindy Roseman's *Beyond Words: Images From America's Concentration Camps* (1987), focuses on the paintings created in camp by internees. This study reproduces many of the paintings and offers personal statements by the artists as well as a brief history of the internments. *Poets Behind Barbed Wire* (1983) features camp poetry in translations by Jiro and Kay Nakano. Miné Okubo's *Citizen 13660* (1946) is an oral narrative through drawings (with some text), created during her internment, depicting her life before, during, and after evacuation.

Of greater scope, however, is Allen H. Eaton's *Beauty Behind Barbed Wire* (1952), to date the only full-length examination of all the visual arts practiced by the
internees. Mostly a pictorial history with some text, Eaton's work sheds light on the use of art as both a coping (or controlling) mechanism and a means of aesthetic gratification. Eaton points out that the evacuees "on their own initiative" began to use art to beautify their surroundings (4). Each camp had its own specialty based on the materials (both natural and man-made) available for use by the internees. For example, because it was situated on a lake bed where shells were plentiful, Tule Lake in Northern California was known for its shell flower designs. Desert gardens were abundant in the barren Gila River (Arizona) camp. Eaton's remarks are supported by photographic documentation, unfortunately in black-and-white, but still capable of demonstrating the transformation through art of the camps.

Eaton's study is more than a presentation of photographic evidence; he looks at the larger picture of why art and beauty flourished at internment camps. Toward the end of his commentary, Eaton articulates the use of art as a controlling mechanism:

It was at these camps that most of these arts were created, although some of the pioneers began in the assembly centers turning to the arts to help them face the uncertain, disheartening, and confusing life before them. (175)

After grappling with the question of how to account for the "unprecedented flowering of the arts under circumstances which seemed least conducive" (116), Eaton reasons,

Part of the answer seems to be that the unprecedented situation gave many a person who had long--consciously or unconsciously--yearned to make some beautiful thing, the time in which to do it. (116)

The repeated use of the word "unprecedented" serves his discussion well. The uniqueness of the internments leads inevitably to unique and specific actions in response to them and ultimately unique analyses/theories based on these actions.
Given these sources, particularly Eaton's, camp art is well chronicled, albeit broadly. Of all the arts, though, theater seems among the most neglected, a surprising fact given that theater flourished to some extent at every camp. Eaton does spend some time on theater, noting the “active dramatic groups in several of the War Relocation Centers,” but curiously allows that “only the briefest reference can be made to them here” (78). Although he speculates as to the *raison d'être* for art in general, Eaton seems to look upon theater solely as a source for beautiful stage costumes, props, and settings, effectively ignoring the cultural import of camp theater (a criterion he does not neglect in his discussion of other art forms):

> What the Japanese theater people cannot do with paper and paint in the way of stage requisites and properties no one can do. Paper in some form—often sculptured papier-mâché—provided most of the needs of the camps for their dramatic productions, and only close wrong-side-out inspection could have revealed the unglamorous, commonplace nature of the materials used, most of which would ordinarily be consigned to the trash pile. (78)

Furthermore, Eaton focuses exclusively on Issei theater—Kabuki drama primarily—and the tangible evidence of them left behind, at the expense of the equally prolific Nisei theater found in almost every camp. This study proposes to fill Eaton's gap by introducing Nisei theater, reconstructing its performances, and offering an emended *raison d'être* for both camp art in general and camp theater in particular.

Nisei theater may be the best kept secret of internment camp culture. Unlike the Issei theater (what we may label “traditional” Japanese theater) which, as Eaton points out, produced very tangible works of art in the form of stage properties and the like—and which have been preserved by photograph—little evidence of Nisei theater exists. Some
photographs exist, all of which are high school yearbook photos of student productions. Camp newspapers announce the dates and casts of performances, but few papers allow more than a brief mention of theater as an extracurricular activity, and fewer still offer anything in the way of a post-performance review. Very few surviving internees remember theater, which is not surprising given that most likely a very small percentage of colonists at any given camp saw Nisei theater. Many who do remember theater do so in very non-specific ways; Miné Okubo’s Citizen 13660 offers the following explanation under a sketch of a performer: “Entertainments were given on makeshift stages in the mess halls and in the open. Talent shows and plays were presented. Later an auditorium was built” (173). A recent book on one of the camps, Tule Lake Directory and Camp News (1988), mentions theater only in passing as represented by two brief articles from the camp newspaper, the Tulean Dispatch. Ironically, Tule Lake was the camp with the most extensive Nisei theater group and the greatest newspaper support. That theater rates hardly a mention in the Directory and Camp News says something about the availability of information on the widespread cultural phenomenon of camp theater.

Despite this dearth of information, it is true that Nisei camp theater did exist. Just as every camp had a newspaper, showed movies, and sported baseball teams, nearly every camp had a theater group, or at least announced the formation of a group. Most groups were simply a part of high school life with a junior or senior class play directed by the school’s Caucasian English and/or Speech teacher. Other groups, particularly Tule Lake’s Little Theatre, operated outside of the high school and were run by Nisei. I have termed the theater produced by these groups as Barrack Theater and have contrasted
it with the High School variety. Together, both forms of Nisei theater represent a cultural phenomenon rendered all the more compelling for analysis because of the unique historical situation which fostered it.

Once uncovered, the larger questions of Nisei theater are why did it exist at all, why did it exist in the forms in which it did, and what does the existence of theater in what were essentially concentration camps say about the human need to create art, even under the most oppressive of situations? As Eaton's speculations suggest, the uniqueness of the internment camp experience must not be overlooked in formulating a theory for the existence of camp theater.

A Brief History of the Internments

Although the history of the internments is well documented, it is appropriate, given the scope of this study and the emphasis placed on the relationship between the relocation camps and the need for theater, to provide a brief yet concise chronicle of events. This description will offer general information applicable to all camps; subsequent chapters on theater at particular camps will provide more specific information geared to the camp in question. Of necessity, a number of details leading up to various phases of the evacuations are omitted.

The background for the internment of more than 100,000 people of Japanese descent may be traced to immigration laws and general racial policies in the United States since the 19th century. Between 1900 and 1940, Japanese population in the United States grew from approximately 24,000 to nearly 127,000; as Roger Daniels points out,
relative to population growth in the United States the Japanese never amounted to more than 0.02% of the total population (Prisoners Without Trial, 8). Various quota acts and exclusion laws (many originally aimed at Chinese immigrants) were responsible for restricting Japanese immigration. Issei were not able to obtain citizenship (neither could any Asian-born immigrants) nor could they own land. As the Japanese population in America grew, the number of Issei declined and the number of Nisei grew rapidly. By 1940 well over half the Japanese in America were Nisei, American citizens all. Still, general mistrust and hostility toward the Japanese—particularly on the West Coast where nearly 90% of them lived—characterized relations with the Caucasian majority.

The surprise bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 gave clearance for the United States government to pursue an official policy of exclusion and (eventually) evacuation against the Japanese. Citing military necessity, West Coast politicians (particularly from California) pressured President Franklin Roosevelt to take some form of action against the Japanese living in America who were considered potential spies or saboteurs for the Emperor of Japan. Clearly, no consideration was given toward the fact that in 1941 most of the Japanese living on the West Coast were Nisei, and therefore American citizens. As a result, most Nisei felt secure in their status as citizens and worried more about the fate of the Issei who became, thanks to Pearl Harbor, aliens whose native country was at war with their adopted country. By the end of January, 1942, the Justice Department declared certain zones on the West Coast prohibited from alien Japanese, Germans, and Italians, an act which seemed to justify Nisei concerns for Issei. By early February the FBI and local law enforcement officials conducted surprise
search and seizures in alien Japanese homes and businesses, resulting in numerous arrests and the confiscation of contraband including cameras, maps, and firearms. These actions, which became the news events of the day, further escalated public fear of the Japanese and led to more stringent policies against them.

Official government policy—essentially "once a Jap always a Jap"—made it only a matter of time before the Nisei would be associated with the Issei as enemies of the state. Attorney General Earl Warren articulated the general consensus that the Japanese, either born here or abroad, posed a grave danger, albeit a danger which Germans and Italians, with whom we were also at war, did not pose:

There was, he said, no way to determine the loyalty of Japanese Americans. It was impossible for Americans to comprehend Oriental ways; the alien culture was diffused through religion, language schools, and the practice of sending children to Japan for education... Warren alleged that Japanese in America generally approved of Japan's military conquests, implying that they would also favor the conquest of America, and he declared that the Japanese government exerted a broad control over the activities of all Japanese in this country. (tenBroek, Barnhart, and Matson 84)

Warren's thoughts were echoed by West Coast politicians and newspapers, despite intelligence reports extolling the loyalty of the great majority of Japanese of both generations. On February 19, 1942 President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 which empowered the Secretary of War to designate areas of the country as military zones, and to exclude from these areas whoever the military deemed necessary for security reasons. This order was crafted under the direction of Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt, commanding officer of the WDC (Western Defense Command), which was commissioned to protect and defend the Pacific Coast of the United States. DeWitt, who
stated that “the very fact that no sabotage has taken place to date is a disturbing and confirming indication that such action will be taken,” dictated a haphazard policy toward the Japanese under the guise of “security.” On February 25, 1942 he ordered the evacuation of Terminal Island, giving 2,000 Japanese 24 hours to sell all their belongings and depart. On March 2 DeWitt declared the western half of California, Oregon, and Washington as military zones with specific areas of exclusion. At the time DeWitt offered voluntary evacuation to the Japanese populace of these areas, but his offer was largely ignored because the Japanese knew they were equally unwelcome in the interior of the country. On March 24 DeWitt established nighttime curfews and a five-mile travel restriction only on persons of Japanese ancestry. On March 27 he outlawed voluntary evacuation altogether.

By April 1942 Civilian Exclusion Orders began to appear on telephone poles in all Japanese communities on the West Coast. If the Nisei entertained any thoughts that, as a consequence of their citizenship, they would not be required to comply with any evacuation orders aimed at Japanese, they were quite mistaken. The exclusion orders clearly state that “all Japanese persons, both alien and non-alien, will be evacuated” (emphasis added). Nisei and Issei alike were told to gather bedding and linens, extra clothes, cutlery and dishes, toiletries, and “essential personal effects” for travel to the “Reception Center.” The evacuees were forced to sell their belongings at ridiculously low prices, or simply to leave them behind. As the evacuations progressed, DeWitt designated all of California, Oregon, Washington, and the western half of Arizona as military zones and exclusion areas. As John Tateishi remarks in *And Justice for All*, “No
one of Japanese ancestry living in the states of California, Oregon, and Washington, whether citizen or alien, enjoyed freedom in America by June 1942” (xx).

The first stop for the newly incarcerated Japanese was one of two Reception Centers for processing, and then on to Assembly Centers, 16 in all, which were often nothing more than hastily converted racetracks and fairgrounds. Miné Okubo’s description of the Tanforan Assembly Center (formally the Tanforan Race Track) serves well to document the conditions the Japanese had to face:

We walked in and dropped our things inside the entrance. The place was in semidarkness; light barely came through the dirty window on either side of the entrance. A swinging half-door divided the 20 by 9 ft. stall into two rooms. The roof sloped down from a height of twelve feet in the rear room to seven feet in the front room; below the rafters an open space extended the full length of the stable. The rear room had housed the horse and the front room the fodder. Both rooms showed signs of a hurried whitewashing. Spider webs, horse hair, and hay had been whitewashed with the walls. Huge spikes and nails stuck out all over the walls. A two-inch layer of dust covered the floor, but on removing it we discovered that linoleum the color of redwood had been placed over the rough manure-covered boards. (Citizen 13660, 35)

Barbed-wire fences and armed military guards surrounded the Assembly Centers, at which most evacuees lived for up to six months. After their period at the Assembly Centers, evacuees were taken by rail to Relocation Centers where they would remain for the next two to three years.

There were a total of ten Relocation Centers, most located in deserts or swamps, and found in seven states: California (Tule Lake and Manzanar), Idaho (Minidoka), Utah (Topaz), Arizona (Gila River and Poston), Colorado (Granada, a.k.a. Amache), and Arkansas (Jerome and Rohwer). Instead of horse stalls, prefabricated army barracks covered in black tarpaper greeted the internees. Barracks were 20' by 100'; fourteen
barracks formed a block, nine blocks formed a ward. Firebreaks of 200' separated the wards. Within each barrack were "apartments," designed primarily as sleeping quarters, twenty feet by anything from eight to twenty-five feet. No apartment had a kitchen, water faucet, shower, or toilet, only a stove, cots, mattresses, and blankets. One barrack served as a recreation hall but there were also mess halls, laundry rooms, washrooms, and a block manager's office (usually an apartment converted into an office). Many of the camps were unfinished when the evacuees arrived. Thanks to the artistry and ingenuity of the colonists, "[b]arren camps were being transformed gradually into attractive homes and communities" (Eaton 4).

The Importance of the High School to Camp Theater

In *Prisoners Without Trial*, Roger Daniels describes the type of community generally developed at every camp:

Each relocation center became a kind of American community, with many of the institutions that existed in the larger society. There were schools, libraries, hospitals, newspapers, churches, and what the WRA called "community government" . . . No important decisions could be made by the so-called government. (66)

Of these, the institutions which factor greatly in the evolution of camp theater are the libraries, newspapers, and, especially, the schools. Every camp had a high school, particularly since most of the internees were Nisei of high school age. In time the high school became the center of cultural activity for the Nisei. The schools were only a part of a planned community type of arrangement which the government believed "could speed up the assimilation of Japanese Americans into the dominant pattern of American
life" (James 38). Significantly, the original choice of the government community planners was to have the Japanese themselves handle all the teaching responsibilities at the schools. This plan soon changed, and although there were a great number of Japanese Americans teaching at the schools, the majority of the teaching (as well as the bureaucratic decision-making) was done by Caucasians. Thus, for the most part, Nisei theater centered at the high schools was administered by Caucasians with Japanese American assistants--a pattern which echoed that of the camp school system itself.

If schooling became an issue for the camp planners, it was always so for the Japanese. As Thomas James remarks in *Exile Within: The Schooling of Japanese Americans, 1942-1945,* "children of Japanese immigrants came to American education with an organized commitment to schooling" (12). By 1940 it was apparent to both Issei and Nisei that racial tensions in the United States made it difficult, if not impossible, for the average Nisei to compete for jobs. Thus, education was emphasized as a means to be more competitive with Caucasians on the job market. In *The College Nisei* Robert W. O'Brien notes that "the Nisei tended to concentrate their energies upon class work and to exclude themselves from extracurricular activities, except for athletic contests" (8). Camp life seemed to change all that, however. In their attempt to merge school and community, the camp planners encouraged many extracurricular activities, some linked directly to the school environment and others offered to anyone within a "school-like" atmosphere (that is, a voluntary class taught by masters of the particular craft or skill). Camp newspapers reveal that speech classes, art classes, reading groups, and industrial
skills classes were offered, aimed primarily at Nisei who seized upon such opportunities “as if they were lifeboats in the daily boredom of exile” (James 65).

Theater groups were no exception. Like the various forms of visual art which Eaton claims were created by “unschooled persons who had never before done work of this kind” (116), theater seems to have been practiced by many Nisei who had not the slightest interest in performance before their internment. Jofu Mishima, an internee/performer at Heart Mountain, acknowledged this point:

We nisei . . . were not socially sophisticated for our time and drama was not an ordinary activity that the large majority of nisei males would have participated in if we had not been segregated into camps. (Undated)

When asked what he meant by “socially sophisticated,” Mr. Mishima replied,

What I meant by “socially sophisticated” is that I perceived that most of the nisei of school age prior to World War II did not behave in a manner consistent with what I knew of “main stream” teenager[s]. My perspective is limited since I am also a member of the nisei and not the main stream. (May 14, 1995)

He also speculates that

[a]lthough Noh and Kabuki had been practiced by the Samurai and Daimyo (nobles), most of the [Japanese] people in the U.S. came as contract laborers from the farming kens like Hiroshima and activities such as play-acting were not part of their image of men who worked and raised families. (May 14, 1995)

Mishima’s fellow internee/performer at Heart Mountain, Ralph Yanari, concurs but offers another interpretation of Nisei character as a reason why drama was not an “ordinary activity”:

I think the Niseis were a little bit shy or not outgoing in this type of thing, especially in the acting or dramatic field as far as I felt. It was always emphasized that we should get our education. That was the main thing in
most of the Oriental families. Especially our parents were always thinking we should get education first.

Except for sports, which he concedes were important to the Nisei, Mishima's statements demonstrate the high priority placed on education and the relative unimportance placed on extracurricular activities. Once in camp, though, Mishima became a member of the Heart Mountain drama club, albeit reluctantly:

I took Drama as a junior from Miss Dixie Lee Boyer. As I remember, Miss Boyer tended to be more elaborately madeup than the average woman of the era. I took a role in the class production. I believe it was something like the "Idol[']s Eye." A stock production for young people about a group of sailors that plot to steal a gem that was the idol's eye. I, like other males in the class, was reluctant to take a role. But it was put to me by Miss Boyer that "It could affect your grade!"

Mr. Mishima became quite active in the Richland (Washington) Light Opera Company and the Richland Players as a result of his experiences with theater at camp. Mamoru Inouye was similarly required to participate in theater:

From my elementary school days in Saratoga before the evacuation through my junior high school years at Heart Mountain, I followed teachers' orders and accepted assignments. My small part in the Christmas play was such an occasion. I did not seek the role but did not mind having to appear in public at that time. My goal was to become an engineer and extracurricular activities were secondary to academic studies.

Although others came to camp with an active interest in theater, such stories are few and far between; the majority of camp participants who were introduced to theater at the camp high school left their theatrical ambitions behind when they were released. Still, the high school education system established by the WRA promoted Nisei theater even as it controlled, directly or indirectly (via Caucasian teachers, for example) the artistic decisions such as which plays to produce.
Nisei theater, however, varies between and among camps depending on which camps are being compared. For example, a comparison between Nisei theater at Heart Mountain with that at Gila River reveals more similarities than differences since both engaged in theater of the High School variety. On the other hand, a comparison between Heart Mountain and Tule Lake reveals vast differences indeed, differences which go beyond choice of play and skill of the director. Some classification is necessary so that those camps which practiced what I call High School theater may be consciously studied apart from what I call Barrack Theater. Because high school extracurricular activities remained a staple of camp life, Nisei theater of the High School variety was by far the most common and was found at nearly every camp.

High School theater involves certain identifying traits. Obviously, it was based at the camp high school and presented in the auditorium. Auditoriums generally served as performance space as well as the gymnasium so they tended to be cavernous and presented a number of acoustic challenges. Plays were produced as senior or sometimes junior class presentations, involved large casts, and were usually chosen based on their appeal to high school-aged spectators; farces, light comedies, murder mysteries, and stories about dating and being a teenager were most often featured and these were almost always full-length plays. Productions were directed by Caucasian teachers--usually English and/or Speech instructors--with Nisei assistant directors. Costumes, props, and makeup were the result of the activities of other extracurricular groups based at the high school. Performances usually ran for no more than two nights at ticket prices ranging from 10 to 25 cents. Audiences could number in the thousands depending on the seating
capacity of the venue. Entertainment for the spectators and education in theater arts for the participants were the main concerns of High School theater. In addition, theater at the high school usually had the advantage of both a camp newspaper and a high school periodical in order to advertise. With some variation, this set of characteristics defined Nisei High School theater at most camps.

As cynical and sinister as it may sound, the WRA's control over education at the camps may be viewed as an indoctrination program at the high schools of which theater was a part. Based on the idea that American citizens were somehow alien because of ethnicity, high school theater was never far removed from the goals of the camp education system; learning therefore took place on two distinct levels: pragmatic (for example, how to apply makeup for the stage), and idealistic (how participation in theater leads one to a greater participation in American community life). Obviously, the idealistic level was a much more subtle, existential one, but it also seems to have been the goal most prized by the administration. Ironically, this goal, while preparing Nisei for participation in community life, did not seem to prepare them to take any sort of a leadership role; that was left to the Caucasians. Thus, the High School theater paradigm—Caucasian artistic directors with Nisei actors—merely served to solidify the Caucasian power base by keeping Japanese descendants in subservient positions. In both the world of the theater and the American landscape, the Nisei did not seem to be full and equal participants.

That being said, it is still not entirely possible to determine the extent of WRA involvement/control regarding theater. Too little (at this point) is known about WRA
policy, if any, toward the arts, and even if that could be ascertained, it would have to be further classified on a camp-by-camp basis. It has been tempting for me to assume that the all-powerful WRA, by virtue of the fact that it was the administrative body in charge of the unconstitutional internment of American citizens, insisted on total control of camp theater. While this may have indeed been the case at one or two camps, the evidence that I have acquired thus far seems to indicate that the WRA was not particularly interested in theater, except in its capacity as an extracurricular activity at the high school level. That determination may change in time.

As a further indication of the extent of administrative control over theater, I have attempted to determine the level of outrage engendered by the internments. Along these lines, I have observed a most interesting phenomenon involving camp theater artists and their internment. Most studies of the internment camps, particularly the oral narrative compilations, stress the bitterness and ongoing resentment felt by many Nisei regarding their ordeal during World War Two. Yet, with rare exception, the participants of Nisei theater feel little, if any, of this sense of outrage. For example, in response to my question suggesting that camp life was “horrifying,” Tule Lake actor George Katagiri responded,

In the area of social activities, camp was not a “horrible” place. The nisei developed many friendships and have many pleasant memories of their internment. Although we can paint a rosy picture of many aspects of camp life, nothing can justify the incarceration of over 110,000 persons . . . That was a major mistake by the Government and will be a permanent blot on American democracy.

Like many other Nisei performers, Katagiri is able to distinguish between the injustice of the internments as government policy and the benefits of this experience on a personal
level. It is a distinction I—a Caucasian Baby Boomer—am not always capable of making. Thus, the question I posed to Katagiri was framed by my inability to imagine internees who did not on a daily basis attempt to right the wrongs of internment via revolt. Part of the reason for this phenomenon—the lack of a sense of outrage—is cultural: the Japanese on the whole did not use violence, or even the threat of violence, to achieve desired goals such as freedom. But I have found that the participation of Nisei in activities such as theater served as an acceptable outlet for their frustrations even though this sense of frustration rarely was dramatized onstage.

The Phenomenon of Barrack Theater

As noted above, few camps broke from the High School model to create truly ambitious theater aimed at a broad audience (as opposed to an audience of high school students). Barrack theater, however, was always ambitious in that it strove to reach wider audiences than the high school offered. Like High School theater, Barrack theater has certain identifying characteristics. Although Barrack theater operated through the Recreation Department of the WRA (which paid the salaries of the officers of the theater group, for example), it was much more an autonomous entity than High School theater. Caucasians played a limited (if any) role in the artistic decisions of the theater group; plays were chosen and directed by Nisei who established the group and administered its day-to-day operation. Performances took place in a barrack—usually the Recreation Hall—fashioned to resemble a theater (complete with a backstage area, raised stage, etc.), and could seat no more than 150 per performance. The plays chosen were of
various genres and meant to appeal to a wide variety of tastes; they were almost exclusively one-act plays. Rather than various extracurricular “committees” to take care of props, scenery, costumes and the like, Barrack theater operated as a theater group, usually of the “Little Theater” variety. As such, the goals of the group went beyond entertainment and strove for aesthetic awareness, presumably to make up for a perceived deficiency in the cultural familiarity of most internees; the education of the participants seems to have been a less important goal. Finally, Barrack theater groups had to rely on the camp newspaper to promote their work.

The participants of Barrack theater were more apt to come to camp with an interest in theater, such as Hiroshi Kashiwagi of the Tule Lake Little Theatre. Like many of the internee/performers, Kashiwagi first became interested in theater in high school although he attended high school prior to his internment; “All the time I was interested in forming a theatre group” he remarked regarding his trek from the Assembly Center to the Relocation Camp. Kashiwagi became an active participant in the repertory of the most prolific theater group at any camp. Another theater participant, Wilfred Horiuchi of Poston (later transferred to Tule Lake), had film and radio credits prior to the internments and became a major figure in Nisei theater at camp. Others still went on to successful careers in the theater and in film, such as Tule Lake’s Yukio Shimoda. Perhaps the most important figure in Barrack theater, Sada Murayama of Tule Lake, about whom very little is presently known, seems to have had a vast knowledge of theater and used her talents not only to organize a little theater, but to direct nearly every production and to serve as the general artistic manager for her troupe.
Despite its relative rarity compared with High School theater, Barrack theater was a much more important endeavor. Its existence resonated across cultural and generational boundaries and it served a purpose of some magnitude, particularly in terms of the ability of its participants—both spectators and performers—to acculturate and assimilate within the American mainstream (which we may define as the Caucasian majority at the time). On an artistic level, Barrack theater produced more challenging plays, sometimes technically demanding, sometimes intellectually stimulating, but almost always more than just entertainment (at least from the point of view of its organizers). In general, Barrack theater tended to serve a cultural purpose defined by and for the Nisei themselves, while High School theater more or less served the purposes of the WRA, which in turn believed itself to be serving the purposes of the nation as a whole. It is my opinion that Barrack theater attempted to stimulate the mind in order to achieve a greater cultural good from within an oppressed subculture. High School theater also sought to address a larger cultural purpose, but as defined by the mainstream. As such, only Nisei theater of the Barrack variety truly attempted to address the concerns, desires, and needs of its own constituents first before embarking on interaction with the mainstream.

Because High School and Barrack are very different varieties of Nisei theater, it is important to establish just what is meant by the term “theater” in the context of the internment camps. “Theater,” on a casual basis, may be taken to mean both performance and text, although technically the term “drama” should be applied to textual study and “theater” to studies of performance (as well as audience, management, criticism, etc.). On the whole, the phenomenon of the theater at the internment camps is more
performance-based than text-based. At present, my research has not revealed very much about the process of selecting or rejecting plays, and so I am left in the limited position of accepting the plays produced on their own terms and not as they stack up against other texts, nor how they may have been perceived as reflective of the internment process itself. While the plays produced by the internees (whether chosen by Nisei or Caucasians) demand analysis in light of the context in which they were appropriated, the fact is that more or less canonical works were chosen and their appropriation, as far as can be ascertained, was not meant to make “statements” (political or otherwise) about the internments, the treatment of Japanese citizens, or any other social conditions which existed at the camps. To be sure, the case can be made that such “statements” were present in the plays chosen for production (O’Neill’s *Ile at Tule Lake*, for example), and I have tried to offer such interpretations where applicable, but with the rare exception of Poston, where original plays were written for performance, there was no Nisei drama.

The act of producing theater at the camps by the Nisei, then, will be the focus of this study for two reasons: 1) There is simply too little information at this point to allow more than a cursory appraisal of the plays as texts within the context of the camps and 2) there is ample information available to allow for determinations to be made regarding the non-text-based use of theater at the camps.

Although I will be arguing that the uniqueness of the internment camp experience created an equally unique theater, such an argument is true only within the context of a relatively small period of historical time. Within the context of the theatrical timeline, however, Nisei theater occupies (or will come to occupy), I think, a more expansive
position. I see Nisei theater as part of the phenomenon of Tributary Theater, an idea advanced by Edith J.R. Isaacs, editor of Theatre Arts Monthly. Stressing the vitality of the Little Theater movement which developed across the United States as alternatives to mainstream, New York-based theater, Isaacs' criteria for Tributary Theater seem to be fulfilled at the camps, particularly in the form of Barrack theater. Whether Nisei theater may eventually be considered simply a part of the theatrical mainstream (and therefore an active part of Tributary Theater) or some other phenomenon remains at present an open question. But as more is learned about the nature of theater at the camps, the more likely it is that it will be viewed as a more mainstream phenomenon, albeit within a more or less closed cultural system. Surely, though, within the context of American theater of the 1940s, the Nisei seemed to have stumbled upon a vibrant and evolving theatrical trend.

How This Study Was Undertaken

If my research has taught me anything about camp theater, it is that no two camps were alike and each has its own story to tell. From Heart Mountain, the camp which sported the quintessential High School theater, to Tule Lake which developed the finest Barrack theater at the camps, to Poston which attempted to present original plays, the narratives of camp theater are fashioned both by the common history which led to the existence of the camps and by the particulars at each camp: its personnel, its size, and the organization of its government, housing, and education. I have chosen to review the six camps which I feel contain the most compelling narratives and which stand out as the most important toward an overall understanding of the phenomenon of camp theater.
As complete a portrait of theater at each camp will be offered and, where available, the voices of the internees themselves will supplement the evidence presented. The majority of information has been gathered from the camp newspapers, but as is often the case, many of the newspapers did not offer more than announcements that a certain performance will be given on a certain day. Performance details such as a cast list were often reproduced in the newspapers, but extra-performance details such as rehearsals, acting style, directorial vision, and the like were seldom if ever noted. Similarly, announcements of performances included only the information not readily available to the informed reader (that is, ticket prices, show times and dates, etc.), therefore considerations such as stage dimensions, wing space, acoustics, and so on may not be available. When included, they are almost always based on the recollection of a performer and/or are assumptions taken from photographs. Post-production details such as reviews were rare but will be noted and/or reproduced when available.

I have chosen to examine each camp in chronological order, from the first evidence of an interest in theater to the final productions, usually just prior to the closing of the camp. This technique allows us to see the camp’s theatrical story unfold within the framework of history, and chronicles the changes in theatrical practices as they occur because of or despite changes in the day-to-day operations at camp. We may see, for example, how an increased level of administrative control affected the main theater venue at Poston, or how the complications surrounding the decision to register internees influenced the repertory of the Tule Lake Little Theatre.
Following my discussion of the individual camps, I undertake a closer look at camp theater, examining it from the perspective of cultural anthropology and performance theory. My goal is to offer answers to the central questions I believe camp theater poses, namely, where are we to position camp theater on a broader theatrical/cultural landscape? If we take as a given that theater as an artform is informed and at times solely identifiable by the culture which produces it, then we must be prepared to place camp theater within the boundaries of a unique situation: a culture (the internment camps themselves) within a culture (the American mainstream) made up of still other cultures (Issei, Nisei). Which culture, then, produced camp theater and to what end? How does camp theater modify, challenge, or accept our notions of theatrical performance? Where on the scale of performance does camp theater exist? Is it closer to ritual or to secular entertainment? Whose perspective will determine the answers? The first half of this study will answer the "who," "what," "when," "where," and "how" of camp theater; the second half will tackle the "why."

As Peter Schumann of the Bread and Puppet Theater has remarked, "The arts are political, whether they like it or not" (qtd. in Van Erven), and ultimately, internment camp theater became political in nature no matter who produced it or under what constraints. The very fact that the internment camps existed at all is a political reality one uses to contextualize theater in general, but the classifications of theater at the camps show various political agendas being played out. At the high school level theater became a means to an end unrelated to the practice of stage craft, but very related to the mainstream political landscape of America. The political agenda at the high schools was
that of the Caucasian mainstream in what amounts to, as I have argued earlier, a program of indoctrination. Barrack theater took on a more active political role although it was rarely at odds with mainstream politics. Its political agenda was one of accommodation. In short, all theater participants—Caucasian and Japanese—understood the unfairness associated with the internment camps and sought to correct it, using theater as a vehicle for change—although neither really attempted to make political change in the long run.

The overall picture of camp theater I hope to present is one of an ongoing phenomenon—occurring simultaneously throughout the camps—which was often at the mercy of the march of history and controlled by forces powerful enough to determine how that march would evolve. But Nisei theater is equally a study of courage, hope, and a laudable stoicism on the part of its participants who utilized theater both as a means of escape and a means of re-entry. Their level of success, it seems to me, is not nearly as important as the fact that they made an attempt, particularly with an artform which was in general unknown to them.

My other purpose in chronicling such events is also to make certain that they are not lost, a difficult task on many levels, not the least of which is that so few of the internees alive today recall theater. Even for those who do, there is a tendency among the performers to downplay all they did: “it is difficult for me to comprehend why anyone would be making inquiries about Little Theatre activities . . . in the remote internment camps,” wrote George Katagiri. I believe it imperative that we retain their tales of how they coped when left, for a brief but significant time, without an identity and without a country.
NOTES

1. The two Thomas volumes along with the tenBroek, Barnhart, and Matson work, are known as the JERS trilogy and were published under the general title "Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement." JERS is the acronym for the Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement Study, a project directed by Dorothy Thomas, a demographer and sociologist at the University of California, Berkeley.

2. Created on March 18, 1942, the WRA was a civilian organization designed to oversee the ten Relocation Camps and given broad discretion as to their governance. The Assembly Centers, by contrast, were administered by the Wartime Civil Control Administration (WCCA), an arm of the United States military.

3. Photographs were not allowed to be taken by internees, so photographs which exist are more or less "official." Such photographs include staged poses for high school yearbooks and documentation of camp life such as outdoor theaters. Films also exist showing various activities (from both Assembly Centers and Relocation Camps), but again these films are "official."

4. For example, Tule Lake had roughly 18,000 colonists at its peak but performances of the Tule Lake Little Theatre served no more than 750 spectators, a little more than 4% of the population. Admittedly, the true number of spectators at any given time is practically impossible to know; my point is simply that Nisei theater was not seen by a majority of the colonists.

5. The use of the term "concentration camp" has caused distress for some, including me, due to its connotation as a Nazi death camp. However, the term does have a history prior to the rise of the Third Reich and Roosevelt himself used the term when referring to the internments. I shall use "internment camp" or "relocation camp" most often, although I may resort to "concentration camp" when a particularly negative emphasis is desired.

6. I am not suggesting that to be an actor or prop master is in any way subservient to the role of director in practical terms. However, in the case of High School theater, the Caucasian director chose the play to be produced, cast that play, and made decisions regarding stage movement and text interpretation. My point is that the Nisei
participants were merely following a script prepared in advance for them by Caucasians, thus rendering them subservient to mainstream decisions.

7. Isaacs first defined her notion of the Tributary Theater in the September 1926 issue of *Theatre Arts Monthly* (10: 567-579). She uses the term "tributary" in two ways: as a native theater "paying tribute to and taking tribute from New York" (570), and as akin to a stream which acts as a tributary to a larger body of water (in this case, New York theater).

8. There are, of course, exceptions to this generalization. At Tule Lake in particular, violence erupted causing massive changes in camp structure and directly affecting theater at the camp.

9. Camp newspapers were a factor at all camps. They were published at various times during the week depending on the camp. Tule Lake’s *Tulean Dispatch*, for example, was a daily; the *Poston Chronicle* was issued twice-a-week.
"D'Amato Stirs Furor With Mocking of Ito; Japanese-Americans Call Senator a Racist." Chicago Tribune April 6, 1995.


Thirteen miles northeast of Cody in Park County, Wyoming, was situated the 46,000 acres of the Heart Mountain Relocation Center. Using peak populations as a guide, Heart Mountain ranked fourth among the ten camps, with nearly 11,000 internees housed there by August, 1942. Although dissention and altercations were known at the camp, Heart Mountain's inhabitants (mostly from California, but also from Oregon and Washington) were relatively peaceful. According to Allen H. Eaton's *Beauty Behind Barbed Wire*, Heart Mountain distinguished itself in the arts because of the embroidery produced there. From the perspective of this study, however, Heart Mountain further distinguishes itself as the camp where High School theater thrived. Of all the camps, Heart Mountain remains the epitome of High School theater.

Evidence of theatrical activity at Heart Mountain is chronicled in the camp newspaper, the *Heart Mountain Sentinel*, although information is generally limited to notices of upcoming performances and cast lists. The paper did not seem particularly supportive of theater as anything more than a high school extracurricular activity, but the *Sentinel* should not be faulted for this since there does not seem to have been a more compelling reason for the existence of theater at Heart Mountain; the camp participated
fully in the WRA's program of school activities as a parallel to American community life. Theater at this camp was designed to provide high school-age internees with a way to combat boredom while involving them in the arts and preparing them to participate more fully in the mainstream upon their release. Apart from newspaper notices, more information is known to me about theater at Heart Mountain because of the willingness (and availability) of participants to talk of their experiences.

The *Heart Mountain Sentinel* began operation on October 24, 1942 but the first mention of Nisei theater does not occur until May 22, 1943 with the following announcement, “High School Seniors to Give Three-Act Play Next Month.” The play chosen, Jack Bernard's *Mumbo-Jumbo* (1940), was a senior class presentation directed by Caucasian faculty member Joy Kreuger, identified as an “art instructor” by performer Mamoru Inouye (*Heart Mountain High School* 5). Working with Ms. Kreuger was Nobu Okano, “assisting student director,” who announced the following committees in the *Sentinel*: Publicity, Backstage Director, Tickets, Make-up and Costumes, Ushers, and Program. The need for such committees suggests more about the psychological condition of the participants than about the extensiveness of the production. No doubt sensing that boredom was the primary affliction among internees, theater organizers at the high school formed committees to give participants something to do. Unless specific flyers were made and distributed around camp, publicity was limited to space in the *Sentinel*; ushers seems a superfluous touch given such crude surroundings, but, as at other camps, an attempt was made to imitate a “real” theater environment. Utilitarian concerns aside, committees were undoubtedly formed to advance the cause of community planned for
According to actor Ralph Yanari who portrayed, as he put it, a “highway cop” (Monahan), the decision to produce this play was rather impulsive:

Ted Fujioka [another performer; portrayed Dr. Gaza Omahandra], who was killed in the war, in France, he was our leader. We had a group of us who were always sitting around talking and doing things, and he thought—I think Joy Kreuger, too, must have brought in the idea—to put on a senior class play. It’s a play that Joy Kreuger picked up somewhere. Since the bunch of us were always going around together in school we thought, hey, that might be a good idea. Get some activity here from the senior class. And so we decided to do it and everybody had fun doing it.

Yanari’s fellow cast member, Frank Mouri, who played the “part of a girl” (his character, Pee-Wee Smith, impersonates a woman for a great deal of the play) agrees that impulsiveness was behind the staging of Mumbo-Jumbo, but remarks that he was the impulsive one of the group:

On my part, it was done on a whim, so to speak. I had no interest in acting or anything connected with the stage. I believe the others were very serious about it, and they wanted to do their best. It was something for them to do in order to get their minds off of camp life at Heart Mountain.

Mouri also articulates the importance of theater as a means to combat boredom which affected not only spectators but performers as well. Similar sentiments are voiced by Katsumi Kunitsugu who enrolled in the Heart Mountain theater class “because I was interested in literature in general, and having my hand in all sorts of extracurricular activities, was looking for an easy class. I had no illusions that I could act, and I was right.”
Mumbo-Jumbo was the first event held in the newly-completed high school auditorium. Jofu Mishima's description of the Heart Mountain High School stage provides some detail of the area used for theater:

The stage and lighting were very rudimentary. This is the same stage used for community affairs and high school graduations. The stage was located on one end of the gymnasium. It had a main curtain that I "pulled" as a stage hand with possibly 2 sets of short side curtains and a back curtain that may have been a fire curtain. The floor was much like the gymnasium floor and shellacked. The lights consisted of 2 rows of strip light overhead. I do not remember any ellipsoids or Fresnels or any area lighting at all. The lights were "on" or "off."

Mamoru Inouye describes the stage as a "combination auditorium-gymnasium." A feeling for the size of the stage may be obtained by considering a photograph of the Heart Mountain High School faculty posed on the auditorium stage. Using the "HM" [Heart Mountain] insignia on the valance as a center point (although the group picture is not centered under it), one may see just how large the stage was.  

In addition to the Sentinel, the camp high school paper, Echoes (later named Eagle) announced plays. The April 30 issue offers a slightly different emphasis on the production of Mumbo-Jumbo:

Under the direction of Albert Saijo, student director, with Satsuki Hachiya assisting, the Senior class will produce a play called "Mumbo-[J]umbo." The faculty director is Miss Kruegar [sic]. The play will be shown probably in the latter part of May. Rehearsals will begin as soon as the scripts arrive.

As might be expected, this notice highlights the role of the Nisei student directors, Albert Saijo and Satsuki Hachiya, neither of whom is mentioned in the Sentinel. In addition, it is apparent through this notice that scripts were ordered from somewhere,
perhaps directly from the publisher, Samuel French, which had offices on the West Coast in Los Angeles. Later issues of *Echoes* reveal that tryouts for the play were held after school and that the cast was made up of “seniors who have had little or no previous experience in acting, but that makes it all the more merrier.”

The play itself is well-suited for high school productions. Its cast is large (16) and the entire play takes place on a single set—the living room of a summer home in New England. The characters are, with the exception of the male leads, Dick and Pee-Wee, rather eccentric and fun to portray. The play involves two college boys who attempt to raise money by turning the home into a country hotel (the residence belongs to Dick’s uncle who is out of town). They get in trouble with the law twice: first for failing to possess a sign permit in order to advertise their new venture, and then for the murder that takes place on the property. Besides two sheriffs from adjoining counties (both claim jurisdiction over the corpse), a man and his mother who turn out to be gangsters, and strange West Indian mystics, a ten-year-old girl manages to solve the mystery quite innocently.

As far as murder mysteries go, *Mumbo-Jumbo* presents few, if any, technical obstacles, making it an easy play to produce effectively. Costuming may have presented some difficulties, although a cast picture of the production shows rather well-tailored costumes including large turbans for Dr. Omahandra and his cohorts, a sheriff’s outfit complete with trooper hat and cowboy boots, and a highway cop outfit with cap and leather jacket. It is probable that most of these outfits—or various components of them—either were owned by the actors, or borrowed from friends or family members; the
turbans were most likely made for the production. At one point Monahan remarks (regarding the newly deceased Peaches Greeding) "Never did go for blondes." Since the actress portraying Peaches, Masako Kamei, was not a natural blonde, it remains unknown whether a blonde wig was used for the production or if Monahan's line was changed (or omitted); the existing photo of the cast shows Ms. Kamei without costume. As for staging, nearly all of the cast members appear on stage at once during the action and this may have presented some sight-line problems. However, it must be remembered that the Heart Mountain stage was cavernous which allowed ample room for performers to spread themselves out over the stage. The aforementioned cast photo reveals a simply-constructed set of flats and some sparse furnishings. No decorations appear on the walls, although these may have been added after the picture was taken. Most likely, though, the audience was asked to use its imagination with the set, envisioning a New England summer home on what could easily be a West Coast living room as well.

Given the importance placed on the high school for both educational and—because of the internments—recreational purposes, it is not clear why such a significant cultural concern as the first use of the auditorium was not stated until August 12, 1944 in a special issue of the Sentinel looking back on high school activities. What seemed more important to the newspaper at the time of the production was the play's net profit; the June 12 issue of the Sentinel revealed that the two performances of the play earned $178. Although ticket prices were not published in the paper, Echoes reveals that tickets were 10¢ or, for students with an A.S.B. card, a nickel. Using these prices as a guide, $178 would mean that approximately 2,000 spectators attended the two nights of Mumbo-
Jumbo. The June 12 issue of the Sentinel also acknowledges the intermission entertainment of the "High School Trio": Betty Fujimoto, Tamaki Inabe, and Chiyoko Inouye. The playbill for the production lists the two songs performed by the trio: "Alice Blue Gown," and "My Heart's In America."

The next mention of high school theater in the Sentinel is in the issue dated November 20, 1943: "Students Give Plays at Thanksgiving Assembly." Two one-act plays—*A Night at an Inn* (incorrectly titled *A Night in the Inn* by the newspaper) by Lord Dunsany and *The Calf That Laid the Golden Eggs* by Babette Hughes—were presented at a Thanksgiving student body assembly in the auditorium. Once again, the extracurricular activities at the high school encouraged the Nisei students to participate in the "community" that was the Heart Mountain Relocation Center. Thanksgiving, that most American of holidays, seemed a logical choice to gather Nisei students together to celebrate their American heritage—ironically, the very facet of their being which was overlooked come evacuation time.

According to the Sentinel, the Thanksgiving plays were directed by Lois Runden, a Caucasian English teacher with a degree from Greeley State College of Education, Colorado. However, Mamoru Inouye gives directorial credit to Katsumi Hirooka for *A Night at an Inn* (and to June Zaiman4 for *The Calf That Laid the Golden Eggs*). If this is the case, the question of who truly directed the plays remains open. Were these productions examples of the rare instances that Nisei would be given permission to direct a play at the high school? Did Ms. Runden serve as overseer, but left most directorial
decisions to her pupils? Or, was Hirooka simply an assistant to Runden who took full control of the duties of director and delegated authority in bits and pieces?

The answers to some of these questions have been provided by Katsumi Kunisugu (formerly Hirooka). Her recollection of *A Night at an Inn* provides a somewhat cynical perspective on theater at Heart Mountain:

I remember “A Night at An Inn”—a one-act play involving a stolen gem from an idol or some such nonsense. Ms. Runden simply appointed me to be the director, and I had no understanding whatsoever what it was that a director was supposed to do. What did I know about pacing, timing, controlling [sic] the actors, having a clear concept of how the play should unfold, feel? And Ms. Runden certainly did not explain. She was one of those forgettable “just going through the motions” teachers who didn’t teach her students anything. (January 5, 1996)

If Kunisugu’s account is accurate, then Lois Runden apparently abandoned responsibility for directing *A Night at an Inn*, although what may have seemed like a lack of interest on Runden’s part may have in fact been an attempt to empower the Nisei by allowing them the responsibility for making some choices which would effect their performance. Still, it is hard to imagine that Runden did not wield ultimate power over the production, if, as Kunisugu recalls, there was no “clear concept of how the play should unfold.”

No matter who was responsible for directing these productions, the plays featured a large Nisei cast labeled “the drama class” in the newspaper. As with *Mumbo-Jumbo*, a number of committees were formed to assist with the production. Separate student directors, make-up and prop masters, and stage managers supported each play. The plays were “reviewed” in the November 27 issue of the *Sentinel* in a small article entitled “Plays Presented by Students Receive Favorable Comment.” However, the only
comment offered by the reviewer was that the productions were “handicapped by poor acoustics.” Still, it is quite rare to find reviews for most high school theater productions.

Set in an inn, Lord Dunsany’s *A Night at an Inn* (1916) involves three merchant sailors and their ring leader, a “dilapidated gentleman” nicknamed The Toff. The Toff has stolen a ruby from the eye of an Indian idol, Klesh, and waits for the three black-robed priests of Klesh to attempt to recover the priceless jewel (this is obviously the play to which Jofu Mishima refers; see Introduction). He fully expects the arrival of the priests and advises his men to hide and wait for the kill. One by one the priests, who have followed Toff’s men for miles, killing two, enter the inn only to be stabbed to death by one of the sailors. Thinking themselves free from pursuit, the four men decide to sell the ruby and make their fortune. Suddenly, Klesh himself appears, takes the ruby, replaces it in his eye, and leaves. The mystified sailors are then called by name and presumably taken out and killed for their misdeed. Only Toff remains as the curtain falls, commenting “I did not foresee it” (34).

No special set design, properties, or costuming seems necessary for this play, thus making it particularly appropriate for staging at Heart Mountain. The dialogue of the play attempts to recreate the cockney-like accent of the sailors (“‘E’s got ‘is plans and ‘e thinks we’re silly folk”), but it is not known if the actors used intonations of this sort. If so, the poor acoustics noted in the *Sentinel* review may have contributed to a poorly understood production. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of staging this play is the appearance of Klesh, who is described in the text simply as “a hideous idol” with a socket in its forehead (where the ruby will be placed when recovered). The make-up

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committee must have devised some way to achieve the effect. In addition, the Indian
characters played by Japanese may have been a rare treat for an audience undoubtedly
used to Asians in theater and (particularly) film playing only Asians.

Katsumi Kunitsugu sheds some light on the performers in this production:

I remember the actors in the play included members of the football team
who were taking the class for the same reason I was—they thought it
would be a snap. And they went through the lines of “A Night at An Inn”
like a big joke, a lark.

Such a description suggests that the play was neither carefully rehearsed nor polished in
performance (it is not clear if the football players spoke their lines jokingly at rehearsals
or performances, or both); if true, this scenario supports Kunitsugu’s previous contention
that Lois Runden did not provide the level of care and professionalism expected from a
teacher.

The group of performers for the Thanksgiving plays were not seniors during the
last school term (which ended in June, 1943) and so were not part of the senior class
production of Mumbo-Jumbo. However, one cast member, Frank Mouri, seems to have
been in both sets of productions. This inconsistency is one of a number of confusions
regarding what was published in the Sentinel and what may or may not have actually
happened at the camp. In the case of Frank Mouri, he is listed as a leading role, Pee Wee
Smith, in the May 22 announcement of Mumbo-Jumbo. As mentioned above, Mouri
himself remembers playing the role of a girl in the play and he has been identified in a
cast picture by his fellow performer, Ralph Yanari. In addition, Mouri is mentioned as a
cast member—the only holdover from Mumbo-Jumbo—in the Thanksgiving plays. It is
entirely possible that Mouri did not appear in the Thanksgiving productions, however,
particularly since he has no recollection of participation in plays other than *Mumbo-Jumbo*. The *Sentinel*’s cast lists have been challenged by a few internees. Both Ike and Mike Hatchimonji deny participation in any productions as does Shig Honda; all three were listed as cast members of a Christmas play, *The Search for the Christ Child* by Frieda Bedwell, directed by Joy Kattner and presented in the auditorium at 7 p.m. on December 19, 1943 and initially announced in the *Sentinel* on December 11. In addition, Mamoru Inouye disputes the *Sentinel*’s claim that he played a leading role in *Why the Chimes Rang*, another Christmas play mentioned in greater detail below.

Christmas plays were common at the camps. The Nisei were by and large Christians (unlike the largely Buddhist Issei), but it is doubtful that these holiday productions were meant solely for the benefit of the Christian Nisei. Rather, such celebrations were most likely part and parcel of the community spirit the WRA attempted to institute at camp. At Heart Mountain, in addition to *The Search for the Christ Child* on December 19, *Why the Chimes Rang*, "a traditional Christmas play by Elizabeth A. McFadden," was presented on December 22. Lois Runden directed the play which was featured at a Christmas assembly for the high school student body. On December 24 the *Sentinel* announced the production of *Shadow on the Sun* at a "Community Christmas Program" in the auditorium. This production is significant for two reasons: it was to be directed by Dave Yamakawa, a Nisei, and to feature an all-girl cast. It appears as though the abovementioned community program was to feature a bill of three plays, including *Shadow on the Sun*, *Why the Chimes Rang* and another piece entitled *The Guardian Star*. Both *Shadow on the Sun* and *The Guardian Star* were cancelled "due to illness."
*Why the Chimes Rang* (1915) proves to be the consummate piece for a Christmas program under internment conditions. Based on a story by Raymond McDonald Alden, the play involves two peasant brothers, Holger and Steen, who live in a hut in a forest. The action takes place on Christmas Eve when the talk of the town is that something great will happen during the processional to present gifts at the altar of the Christ child. The gift which is “full of love for the Christ-child” (12) will make the chimes of a great, mysterious tower ring. As the boys and their uncle Bertel prepare to go to the cathedral, a beggar woman appears seeking shelter and nourishment. The impatient Steen and Bertel depart as Holger decides to care for the elderly woman. She reveals herself as a Sister of Charity, the hut transforms into the cathedral, and Holger watches in amazement as a line of people, including the King himself, offer gifts at the altar. Each listens in anticipation of the chimes which do not ring. Holger’s offer of two pennies makes the chimes ring, prompting the arrival of an angel who articulates the moral of the play: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, it is not gold nor silver nor rich pearls but love and self-sacrifice that please the Lord” (22). Holger’s vision ends as the cathedral transforms into the hut once more.

The play presents several problematic staging requirements—the transformation from hut to cathedral and back to hut, for example—which seem too unwieldy for the auditorium at Heart Mountain High School and its extremely limited resources. However, the 1915 Samuel French edition of the play, presumably the volume Lois Runden had, offers numerous suggestions for the successful staging of the play, “not to college dramatic societies or other expert amateurs but to the many young people in the
secondary schools, Sunday schools and country districts, who would enjoy staging short
plays if it could be done without elaborate scenery or lighting equipment and without
previous experience in stage management" (31). Although the text advises that “music is
perhaps the most important single element in the play” (42), it is the transformations of
place which probably were of greatest concern to Runden since Holger’s vision is both
the theatrical and thematic climax of the play. The text suggests the use of movable
screens (Japanese screens are one recommendation) to change hut into church (a sketch
of screen placement is provided), but also reminds producers that “[simplicity aided by
imagination goes far upon the stage” (31). It is probable that Runden was unable to
reproduce exactly the lighting effects the script calls for (the hut is dimly lit; the angel
appears in a “single pencil of light”), nor its “mediaeval, picturesque” costumes, but she
may have had the music which was sold with the text and may have played it on a
phonograph. Mamoru Inouye (Steen) describes a fireplace on the set as “a three-
dimensional set with the fire simulated by an electric light and red paper.” It is known
that rehearsals were held during school time, as Mamoru Inouye remembers:

My recollection is that my eighth grade English teacher offered me the role. I believe that rehearsals were held during the English class, which allowed me to skip class. (May 5, 1995)

It is not known if the play’s simple message of charity would register with the
predominantly Christian Nisei, particularly since the teachings of Christianity generally
played a minor role in their upbringing, except as a means to assimilate in America.  However, there are some other elements of the script which may have called attention to
their own lives at present. The conditions of squalor⁶, the marginalization of the main
characters, the anticipation of some life-changing event, and the conscious class
distinctions between the privileged class and the peasants may have been seen as an
analogy for life in the relocation camp where the residents (except for the well-housed
and paid Caucasian administrators) were forced to live in poor conditions as they waited
for their return to society and their respect as citizens. Runden’s production may have
demonstrated to some that the truly righteous have a holiness hidden beneath the poverty
of their living conditions. The point may have been further emphasized by the presence
of internee actors in the role of the peasants.

On February 12, 1944 the Sentinel announced the scheduling of a variety show to
be presented by the Senior Tri-Y Girl Reserves and slated for a March 10 premiere. As
was typical of many camps, talent/variety shows were scheduled at various times during
the year and featured an eclectic blend of performance genres:

The program will feature a kitchen band, vocalists, skits, and many
instrumental selections. Highlight of the evening will be a short play, “In
May with June,” directed by Lois Runden, drama instructor.

As was also typical of many camp newspapers, no subsequent notices or review of this
play was offered in later issues of the Sentinel. It remains unknown, then, who was in the
cast of In May with June, when the performances were to begin, how much tickets were
(although proceeds from the variety show were to be used to “send representatives to the
Girl Reserves’ spring conference”), or what exactly the “skits” were. The possibility
exists that the Junior Dramatics Club was involved; the 1944 issue of Tempo, the
yearbook of Heart Mountain High School, displays a photograph of this all-girl club with
the sub-heading “Puppets--Skits.” Lois Runden was the faculty adviser for this group as well.

The senior class play of 1944 was Aurania and William Spence Rouverol’s Young April which was selected at a “try out” featuring judges Lois Runden, Joy Krueger, Ruth Myers, George Kubo, and “student director” Sumi Nishikawa; this try-out was held on a Saturday, notes the school paper, Eagle, along with the disclaimer that “parts are subject to change.” Chosen, according to Katsumi Kunitsugu, because “it had a lot of parts and did not require royalty,” the play is a sequel to Aurania Rouverol’s popular Broadway production, Growing Pains, which chronicled the trials and tribulations of teenage siblings Terry and George McIntyre. Young April follows the young McIntyres in their “later adolescence... during the tender, romantic, impulsive “Young April” age (qtd. From “Story of the Play,” opening pages of Samuel French edition). This uncontroversial, status quo, light-hearted comedy features a speaking cast of 16 and some extras, and was a perfect choice for a high school theater club looking for large cast plays which would appeal to teenagers and, perhaps, their parents. Scheduled for March 3, but apparently produced some weeks later, the production of Young April was not reviewed in the Sentinel, but was in the April 3 issue of Eagle. Unfortunately, this “review” consists of a cast and crew list and the remark that the play “received many comments and applause. Acting ability was evident throughout the play.”

Pictures of this production exist in the 1944 issue of Tempo and therefore some determinations about performance conditions are possible, as are comparisons with the set directions provided in the 1940 Samuel French edition of the play. Evidently, flats
were raised on three sides and a small archway backstage center allowed for exits and entrances; a curtain hangs behind the backstage flat and can be seen in the archway; staging seemed tableau fashion with sight lines of some concern (although the yearbook pictures may have been so staged); sets seemed simple and stark but for a few pieces of furniture; a microphone on a stand is clearly visible stage right, its electric line running the length of the stage visible in the photograph; costumes were contemporary, most likely owned by the actors. A photo of the cast (or, perhaps, performers and others connected with the production) shows 18 participants. It is not apparent from the photos just how carefully the production followed the requirement that the action take place on the modified Spanish patio of a Northern California house. Clearly, no attempt at various levels was made (the set description calls for steps and balconies), nor was there any real effort to make the surroundings look as though they were outdoors. A trellis-type set piece hangs on the backstage flat, clearly visible in two photographs, perhaps suggesting ivy on a patio wall or simply an outdoor planter. It should be made plain, though, that no visual evidence suggests that any type of symbolic set was devised by this production; as realistic a set as possible was constructed given extremely limited funds and resources. In most respects, it appears as though the set were modified to fit the venue, with fewer doors than the script calls for and entrances simplified accordingly. Admission to Young April was 10¢ for students with an activity card and 25¢ for “outsiders.” Proceeds from this production were slated for the school yearbook, Tempo.

Just as Young April was finishing its run as the senior class play, the junior class was preparing its own production: Murder in Rehearsal. This production of the three-act
murder mystery directed by Lois Runden, along with student director Mary Oda, was never mentioned in the *Sentinel* but instead publicized in *Eagle*’s April 3 issue. The play proved to be short-lived for by the April 10 issue of *Eagle* the production was cancelled:

The Junior class play, “Murder in Rehearsal,” will not be presented because too many activities have according to Miss Mary Pagano, been scheduled for this month.

The quest for extracurricular activities to keep the internees busy apparently spread everyone a little thin.

The final high school production at Heart Mountain was announced in the *Sentinel* on March 3, 1945. *Cyclone Sally*, a three-act comedy by Eugene G. Haser was chosen as the senior class play of 1945, co-directed by Dixie Lee Boyer and James Elmore. Two performances were planned for Friday, April 20: a matinee and an evening performance. This announcement in the April 14 issue marks the first time that the *Sentinel* listed ticket prices, perhaps because this was one of the rare times that a matinee was planned (one of the two performances of *Mumbo-Jumbo* was a matinee). The assumption is that performances took place in the evening because during the day--as is the case generally in non-internment societies--students are in school and parents work (the internees had jobs which paid up to $16 a month). That a matinee was mentioned prominently, and given a different ticket price--10¢ as opposed to 20¢ for the evening performance--suggests that it was an unprecedented performance time at Heart Mountain. As usual, no review appeared in subsequent issues of the *Sentinel*, which ceased publication with the July 28 issue.
Eagle, on the other hand, publicized the play from its inception. The March 9, 1945 issue contains a humorous call for auditioners:

All the women's part [sic] in the uproarious [sic] comedy (so they say,) "Cyclone Sally," have been named. The try-out for the men's part [sic] will be held this afternoon for all senior boys having passed the moron stage. So c'mon guys don't let it be said that you are not above the moron stage, come to room 23 at 4:00 P.M. SHARP!!

What exactly is meant by “the moron stage” is not known, but clearly some coercion appeared necessary to get males to participate, perhaps a not uncommon situation given the general reluctance of Nisei males to perform. On April 6, Eagle announced a crew list as well as the performance date: April 20 in the high school gym. The paper notes that “a week before this date, a preview will be presented to the student body in an assembly.” The preview became another means of publicizing the play, although such advertising did not always induce students to attend actual performances. Mamoru Inouye recalls that “[a]ttendance at student assemblies was compulsory, but I never bought a ticket to a Senior Class play” (August 16, 1995). This issue of Eagle also clarifies school policy regarding the matinee—"[t]hose who purchase matinee tickets will be dismissed from school--and the April 20 issue provided the performance times: 2:30 for the matinee, 8:00 for the evening. The paper notes that approximately 195 tickets were sold for the matinee and 100 for the evening performance. The preview was also mentioned and its description affords a look at what assemblies were like at Heart Mountain High:

A preview of the play was given at an assembly held on Wednesday, April 18th. The program consisted of orchestra numbers directed by Mrs. Cowger, an interesting talk from Rev. Donald Toriumi, and 3 popular
songs rendered by the 12 girl chorus accompanied by Ray Egashira. Isao Nishioka then introduced the cast.

_Eagle’s_ May 4, 1945 issue reports that the cast of _Cyclone Sally_ left camp for Powell High School to see its senior class production of _You Can’t Take it With You_.

“After the performance the group . . . had a very informal get together with the members of the Powell play cast.” While it may appear odd that internees would be let out of camp for any reason other than work (such as harvesting nearby farmland), it is probable that rules were relaxed somewhat at this time. By May the camp was only months away from closing and evacuees were leaving in increasing number for homes throughout the United States.

There appears to have been an early attempt to form a barrack theater at Heart Mountain. As was not uncommon at a number of the camps, the newspaper called for interested parties to attend a meeting of a proposed little theater:

**LITTLE THEATRE GROUP ORGANIZED**
Heart Mountain’s theatrically-inclined residents will find an opportunity to display their histrionic talents in the Little Theatre movement, inaugurated last week under William Teramoto. One-act plays are being prepared for rehearsals. Those interested in acting, directing and studying stage technique are invited to join the group. Headquarters for the organization are at 16-N and meetings are scheduled for Friday evenings until further notice. (_Sentinel, October 23, 1943_)

Perhaps encouraged by the success of _Mumbo-Jumbo_, this attempt to form a little theater is significant for a number of reasons. First, as is typical of Barrack theater, it was initiated by Nisei. Second, it was completely voluntary, unlike high school theater which was to some extent mandatory. Third, it sought members who did not necessarily have theatrical experience, proposing to use meetings to teach as well as to rehearse.
Apparently, however, the little theater never materialized for no mention of any productions ever made its way to the camp newspaper. How far along the one-acts “being prepared for rehearsals” were is not known. With rare but notable exception, Barrack theater did not survive past its enthusiastic first notices.

The apparent failure of Teramoto’s theater group does not in any way diminish the success of the theatrical activity at Heart Mountain. The Heart Mountain High School provided its students with ample opportunity to learn the art of the stage as well as with an outlet for activity, thus decreasing the likelihood of an internee backlash because of boredom. Productions, particularly Mumbo Jumbo and Young April, involved many students and enjoyed the support of an enthusiastic student body which made theater at Heart Mountain an extracurricular activity of some note. While theater at the Wyoming camp did not serve the internee population with the same sense of cultural urgency that would characterize activities at Poston and Tule Lake, the fact remains that for a short time at least, the Nisei students—both performers and spectators—left behind the world of prejudice and tarpaper barracks and entered the world of footlights and costumes. It was in this world that they participated in the American mainstream, although they were in reality separated from this mainstream by miles of barbed wire.
NOTES

1. Eaton remarks that embroidery at Heart Mountain was especially popular thanks to the artistry of one Mr. Nagahama, an Issei, who went to the authorities to offer to teach embroidery to the colonists.

2. I am not suggesting that such committees serve no purpose other than to combat boredom. My point is that committees were needed not only for the practical concerns of a stage production, but for the psychological well-being of the participants.

3. It is hard to determine the actual size of the stage. At this point I can only speculate—using the photograph as a guide—that the stage was very large indeed.

4. My assumption is that June Zaiman is Caucasian, although I am not entirely certain that this is the case. However, to keep focus on the contribution of Nisei directors, I have limited my discussion to Hirooka.

5. Kitano argues that the Japanese tend to be tolerant of all religions and are willing to practice the dominant religion of their adopted country. In America, the Issei adopted Christianity and found in church activities a method by which assimilation might be facilitated. Therefore, religious "messages" did not seem to play a particularly large role in Nisei development; the church seems to have been most useful as a factor in secular American society.

6. The fact that the internees spent a great deal of time beautifying their surroundings says something, I think, about their recognition of squalor.

7. It appears that the more successful the high school was at providing activities for the majority of Nisei, the fewer incidents of protest were reported. Heart Mountain was a relatively "calm" camp while Tule Lake, where the high school offered little in the way of theater as an extracurricular activity, was characterized by its violence. This is not to say that the high school did not sponsor extracurricular activities at Tule Lake, but theater was not one of them and I am tempted to believe that the more successful (in terms of presenting a number of shows which "employed" a great many participants) High School theater was at a camp, the more peaceful the camp.
environment. In no small sense does this idea support my contention that theater at the camps provided much more than entertainment—it was also responsible in part for maintaining the peace.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Located in Pinal County, Arizona (50 miles south of Phoenix) on the site of the Gila Indian Reservation, the Gila River Relocation Center opened in July 1942. The government leased the land for the camp from the Gila Indians at $20 an acre, a total of 16,000 acres. The evacuees—roughly 13,000—were mostly from California and Arizona, many not used to the extreme heat of a desert climate. Making the most of their surroundings, as the internees so skillfully did, the barren desert camp soon took on new life through diminutive wood carvings and, particularly, cactus gardens (to replace the more traditional Japanese rock gardens). This sudden merger of East and West was not lost on Anne O'Hare McCormick, reporting for the *New York Times* in January 1944: “It looks like a cross between an American military camp and an Oriental town.”

Theater at Gila River wasted no time getting started. The camp newspaper, the *Gila News Courier*, started publication on September 12, 1942. By September 23 the first variety show was advertised, and on September 30, the following announcement was published:

Initial meeting of the first Nisei Drama Group to be started in either camp will be held on Friday, October 2, at 8 p.m. in Rec. Hall 56. All persons interested are asked to attend this important meeting. Various members
with previous drama experience will be present. George Kanagaki, Social Recreation Chairman, will be in charge of the meeting.

The significance of this formation of a Nisei theater group is apparent, but some clarifications are necessary. First, Gila River was divided into two camps, Butte and Canal, which seemed to enjoy a friendly rivalry, particularly on the baseball diamond; the reference to a group being started “in either camp” refers to this split. This particular group hails from the Butte side of camp, as indicated by the Courier’s policy of devoting separate pages to the individual camps. Second, “Rec. Hall 56” refers to one of the camp recreation halls, which was usually a barrack purposely not fashioned as living quarters. Third, “Social Recreation Chairman” George Kanagaki appears to have been one of the Nisei actively involved in the community “self government” planned for the camps by the WRA. It is not yet known by me what Mr. Kanagaki’s theatrical background, if any, was.

On October 14 the Courier announced the completion of an outdoor stage, west of Block 13; apparently both Canal and Butte had an outdoor stage area. Outdoor stages and/or amphitheaters were common venues at camps, but were most often reserved for traditional Japanese productions by Issei. Indeed, on November 14, the theater’s grand opening featured vocal selections and Japanese dances. Public meetings or celebrations also took place at outdoor stages. At Gila River the stage was elevated 5½ feet above ground with a platform 70 feet wide. The mainstage measured 40 feet by 30 feet with a dressing room on both ends. The implication, given the speed with which theatrical events were being planned, was that the Nisei Drama Group would use the outdoor stage for its first production.
By October 21 the Drama Group was called the Nisei Drama Association and the Courier announced the troupe's newly elected President, Mrs. Verlin Yamamoto, and Secretary/Treasurer, Henry Kuwabara. The theatrical backgrounds of Mrs. Yamamoto and Mr. Kuwabara are not given. The paper also noted that certain members would "aid the cabinet in drawing up a constitution." Apparently the Drama Association, under the general direction of a Nisei community organizer, attempted to mirror the organizational strategies of not only the WRA but the United States government itself. Theater groups routinely organize, elect officers, and follow a "constitution" outlining rules, by-laws, and artistic concept. However, the need for such an elaborate association which could not have operated as a profit-making venture, and must have included members who were new to theater, leads one to speculate that the group was more concerned with demonstrating the formation of an acceptable governing body than with producing theater guided by any particular vision. As was the case with most Barrack theater, a highly organized club was formed, but no theater was ever known to be produced.¹

The Courier of November 4 announced "Thespians Give Initial Play," a headline which proves to be quite misleading. The article itself merely allows that a play is to be presented and offers no specifics as to which play or when its performance(s) would be. Not long after, on January 21, 1943, the Canal side of camp caught the theatrical bug with the following announcement:

CANAL THESPIAN MEET TONIGHT
Everyone interested in participating in plays, monologues, minstrels, and other dramatic skits are urged to attend the meeting tonight from 7 o'clock in the Canal CAS office.
A similar announcement appeared in the Courier's January 30 issue. On February 18 the group, now known as “the Little Theatre Group” (the common name for Barrack theater ensembles), announced a meeting to discuss two one-act plays, Who Gets the Car Tonight? and On the Air, which “have been obtained for the group.” Under what circumstances these plays were “obtained” is unknown. Generally, plays were found in camp libraries or were owned by teachers or members of the troupe.

The Butte theater group announced on March 2 that “[t]he once-postponed Butte Classical Drama will be presented to the public Sunday, March 7 at the amphitheatre from 7 p.m.” What is meant by “Classical Drama” is unclear. Generally, “classical” was a term reserved for Kabuki theater, but it is entirely possible that some form of Western classical theater was meant. Given that outdoor stages were usually where Issei drama was produced, however, there is a strong suggestion that the onetime Nisei Drama Group evolved into an Issei troupe. Meanwhile, the Little Theatre Group of the Canal side of camp commenced rehearsals for On the Air, with an all-girl cast.

Improvements to the Butte amphitheatre were announced on May 1. New floors were installed, dressing rooms were deemed “almost ready,” a semicircular back wall was to be constructed, as were seats in the forward section and posts to mark the audience area. The Canal outdoor stage remained busy, particularly with groups from outside the Gila River camp. On February 27 the L.A. Theatre Troupe brought the comedy Genji to Heiki (according to the Courier, a one-time Broadway success) to the Canal community stage. Here Comes Charlie, a three-act farce, was staged by the Casa Grande Players on May 11. Both performances were free of charge. In a rare camp
review, the May 13 issue of the Courier observed that 3,000 spectators enjoyed Here Comes Charlie, with a peak population of 13,000, more than 20% of the camp attended this event, a rather large showing. The play proved so popular that a repeat performance occurred on May 19.

On July 24 the Courier announced,

"MY SIN" TONIGHT ON CANAL STAGE
Talent show enthusiasts will once again see the startling dramatization of "My Sin," a tragedy starring John Kono, at the Canal community stage tonight from nine. Tomorrow, the Butte Drama Group will appear on the stage with a special kabuki shibai for the Canal public.

Who Mr. Kono is or what the play "My Sin" is about is not known, but obviously this performance, originally staged at a camp talent show, was deemed important enough for a repeat. The notice of the Butte Drama Group's plans indicates once again that it was Issei theater which came to dominate this once Nisei-based troupe. It is possible that the group was still made up of Nisei, but these Nisei apparently felt an uncommon cultural connection to their parent generation. Further investigation is needed to determine if the decision to produce native Japanese theater was the result of an Issei-dominated drama group, or the defiant actions of a Nisei troupe in protest. It was, perhaps, the need to re-establish Nisei control in Butte which led to a Courier notice on October 12, calling for those interested in dramatics to sign up for an adult education course. The notice warns that a course will be offered only if enough interested parties register. This announcement marks the turning point of theater away from a nascent Barrack type to the High School-based variety at Gila River. Although the Nisei-controlled Barrack theater

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offered instruction to its members, this notice of a proposed sanctioned course moves theater out of the barracks and into the schools.

Throughout the month of December, the *Courier* published the announcement of rehearsals for the camp Christmas play, Elizabeth A. McFadden’s *Why the Chimes Rang*, a play similarly produced at Heart Mountain on December 22, 1943. All that is known about this production is that it took place in the Butte amphitheater and featured costumes and music. It is not known if the actors were part of a high school troupe, who directed the production, or even when the performance was held. Final rehearsals were announced on December 21 with no indication if the play would actually be presented on Christmas, a few days later. No review was offered in the immediate post-Christmas Day issues of the *Courier*. However, on December 28 the *Courier* related that a Christmas Day play, *The Gift*, was presented in the camp tuberculosis ward. Produced as a “Christmas Service Project,” the play was presented by the Butte High Fine Arts Club, an all-girl troupe reminiscent of the all-female cast rehearsing *On the Air* at Canal. The appellation “Butte High Fine Arts Club” suggests not only that the high school had become the domain of theater (at least on the Butte side of camp), but that a combination of high school artisans contributed to the production. This phenomena was not uncommon at camp high schools (nor is it uncommon at contemporary high schools); very often productions were the result of the combined talents of a number of extracurricular groups.

Marie A. Foley’s *The Gift* (1921) seems appropriate for the venue chosen for its presentation at Gila River. Set in AD 30 in the town of Judea, the play takes place in the
home of Huldah, a woman who cares for her dying father Malachi and a lame young boy named Joel. As the play opens, Huldah is in a rush to join her neighbors for a trip to see the Galilean, a mysterious figure said to perform miracles. Huldah stresses her disbelief in the Galilean’s powers, but young Joel believes and has made a wreath of roses to bring to him, with the hope that the Galilean will restore Joel’s ability to walk without crutches. Huldah orders Joel to stay with Malachi, worrying about what her neighbors will think if Joel appears before the Galilean; she then throws his wreath into the fire. As she is about to leave the weeping Joel, a blind stranger appears seeking food, shelter, and the Galilean. Huldah orders him out, but he remains with Joel and Malachi. After some give-and-take between the stranger and Joel over who should stay with Malachi while the other searches for the Galilean, Joel finally convinces the blind stranger to go. Joel watches as the stranger meets a traveler and falls to his knees before him. Joel suddenly walks without crutches, the stranger can see, and Malachi dies in peace. Huldah’s return ends the play on an ironic note:

VOICE OF HULDAH. (Just outside the door) After all our trouble, to think we missed Him.---- He must have passed this way, too. STRANGER. (Reverently) Yes, He passed this way. (25)

Aside from the fire which destroys Joel’s wreath, the play presents no significant technical difficulties. However, even easily overcome challenges may have been made more demanding by the venue for this production. Clearly the tuberculosis ward would not have been furnished as a theater, so staging would have to have been crude and technical effects reduced to a symbolic level. It is conceivable that a symbolic fire was created through painting and color, or perhaps a large opening served as the mouth of the
fireplace. In no way does this concession to venue and resources compromise the message of the play, which was sure to give hope to the infirm, particularly those receptive to Christianity. The gravely ill Malachi, lame Joel, and blind stranger—all portrayed by Nisei—must have surely made a connection with the Japanese tuberculosis victims.

On January 15, 1944, the Courier devoted some space to an ambitious dramatic competition:

**CANAL CAS PLANS DRAMA TOURNNEY**

"To be or not to be," "I love you, I love you." Thus will the nationally affiliated organizations of Canal introduce the one-act play tournament to the residents.

To be held on January 22 at 7:30 on the community stage, the CAS has announced that the three winning organizations will receive awards. To date, the following organizations have signed up to participate in the tourney: Troop 65, Phalanx, three Girl Scout Troops, and the YBA.

The play tournament will be in English.

This lively announcement of the competition suggests a great deal more about camp organization, government, and propaganda than it does about a commitment to the dramatic arts. It appears as though camp organizers attempted to use theater as a means to demonstrate the high quality of camp life. Despite the unconstitutional incarceration of American citizens, the thinking may have gone, social clubs such as the Boy and Girl Scouts flourish as the youth of the camp—Nisei all—celebrate community in a friendly competition. These clubs are labeled "nationally affiliated," suggesting that the relocation camps were merely a temporarily segregated part of typical American society. Indeed, an odd sense of Americanism permeates this notice; organized youth who speak English are stressed, suggesting a widespread acculturation by Japanese into the
extracurricular interests of typical All-American (i.e., Caucasian) youngsters. The Issei are clearly not a part of this vision so consciously geared toward the Nisei. This is not to say that the Nisei did not enjoy membership in social organizations or that the powers that be were attempting to hide the fact that camp life was at all times miserable. However, the phrasing, timing, and details of the play competition seem conspicuous, particularly at a time when the government was actively working to right the wrong of its relocation policies. In addition, as noted by Thomas James in *Exile Within*, one aftermath of the mismanaged registration policy was an increased investigation of family relations in Japanese households. Administrators believed that strong family ties (that is, strong ties by Nisei to their Issei parents) would mean a tendency to be disloyal to the United States: “social planners and camp administrators sought to develop the ‘loyalty’ of individuals so that they would leave behind the traditionalism of their kin and community . . . In the minds of many administrators, the enemy became the family itself” (89). Thus, it is no wonder that the Issei generation was subtly yet clearly snubbed by the plans to hold a theater contest.

No review ever appeared in the *Courier*, nor did any indication of what plays were performed and who the winners were. It is possible that no competition was held. Perhaps the announcement of such an event was all the WRA (and its supporters, the JACL)* really required, particularly in light of the publication of Anne O’Hare McCormick’s “Abroad: The Outlook From a Japanese Relocation Camp,” also discussed in the January issue of the *Courier*. McCormick’s article appeared in the January 8 edition of the *New York Times* and focused solely on her observations at Gila River.
Amidst praise for Japanese artistic ingenuity, creating “an oasis in an endless desert of sand,” McCormick offers several commentaries indicating the level of frustration and dependency the evacuees felt toward the administration. She speaks of “an isolated and homesick colony” which wanted to go back to America (one child thought the Relocation Camp was Japan), but which was “kept where they are by their own fears.”

“Increasingly,” McCormick opines, “[the evacuees] incline to regard the WRA camps as a facility and a protection . . . Both they and the Government know that there is no solid legal ground for holding them in detention. If they were politically organized and less frightened they would fight for their civic rights . . . they put an extraordinarily cheerful face upon their tragedy.” It is this “cheerful face” which the WRA counted on (McCormick reports that camp director L.H. Bennett speaks of the “good citizenship” and “good spirit” of the evacuees), particularly to demonstrate that the camps were an unfortunate necessity of war, but not a terrible place to live. The one-act play contest, then, may be seen as an attempt to derail criticism (sure to increase given the Times’ large readership), while at the same time keeping the camp population dependent upon its administrators who would always find some way to keep the population engrossed in typical American activities.

On April 6 the Courier offered “Radio Play Has All-Male Cast.” Radio plays were occasionally produced at camps, but usually no information exists which indicates if the actors went to a radio station or simply “broadcast” the performance through the camp public address system. It is not known whether audiences were present during transmissions, as they would have been during network radio programs. In the case of
this particular radio play, *Where the Cross Was Made*, the performance was held on Easter Sunday during services at the camp chapel. Three 7 p.m. rehearsals were also announced. An all-boy cast under the direction of Sachi Wada (it is not mentioned if he was Issei or Nisei. His name suggests Issei, but this is generally an unreliable test for origin) presented the play under the auspices of the Pilgrim Fellowship. Although the play has not been located for analysis, it is safe to assume that the title published in the *Courier* was not a misprint of Eugene O’Neill’s *Where the Cross is Made* (1918). The O’Neill one-act is not a radio play nor does the title’s “cross” refer to the religious symbol, but rather an “X” made on treasure map. It is a secular piece not particularly suited for an Easter celebration.

June of 1944 saw two unique productions, or, at least, announcements of productions. The June 1 *Courier* published notification of the impending production of Gilbert and Sullivan’s *H.M.S. Pinafore* by the Canal High School “at the new high school auditorium.” No further information appears about this ambitious production which marks the only time anything as lavish as an operetta was attempted by a camp theater group. On June 6, the *Courier* announced,

CAUCASIANS TO STAGE “MOMOTARO”

The Canal High PTA is holding a party for the Canal seniors in the new auditorium, 8:30 tonight.

An elaborate program has been arranged for the evening. The climax of the evening will be a two-act play, “Momo Taro,” [sic] in Japanese with an all Caucasian cast. (Emphasis added)

Although rare, it was not unknown for Caucasians to take part in theatrical productions meant for Japanese actors. At Tule Lake, for example, the departure of a few actors led
to an impromptu production of scenes from *Our Town* featuring Caucasians in the lead roles. However, the situation at Canal is different in that the Caucasians are taking roles in a play which is really an adaptation of a Japanese folktale. *Momotaro* (literally Peach Boy) is a well-known tale of a boy born from a peach who, along with animal companions, conquers Ogre Island and returns with treasures for the elderly couple who reared him (Suchi 236). It is unclear what version of this story was performed, who adapted it for the stage (an internee perhaps?), how the Caucasian actors were tutored in the Japanese language, or why this particular production was mounted. However, some engrossing cultural questions are raised by its existence. The story would likely be known by Issei in particular, and, as explained to me by Professor Shelley Quinn, Professor of East Asian Languages and Literatures at the Ohio State University, would have been recognizable to Nisei as a “fairy tale” (akin to our knowledge of “Little Red Riding Hood”). The Canal High seniors (for whom the performance was held) would be all Nisei. Given the general state of Nisei animosity toward their Japanese ancestry, particularly in the internment camps, it is doubtful that the production would have any deep meaning for Nisei spectators at the cultural level. Rather, the performance may have been received as something of a spoof, a Saturnalia-type festival of role-reversal where the Japanese-speaking Caucasians—speaking in Japanese—may have appeared quite foolish. The Nisei in attendance may have enjoyed the opportunity to have a laugh at the expense of their most antagonistic coinhabitants.

Both the Canal and Butte High Schools staged productions through May 1945, indicating that the entire camp was now fully engaged in theater as an extracurricular
activity. The work of a playwright by the name of Wilbur Braun seems to have been favored, particularly because he was a practitioner of three-act farces with large casts. The high school theater requirements of light-hearted fare with parts for everyone was well-served by the work of Mr. Braun. On November 4, 1944 the junior class of Canal High School offered an 8 p.m. performance of Braun’s Speed, directed by Miss Maxine Higgins, although a later reference to her spells her last name as Hagan. This announcement (which appeared in the October 12 issue of the Courier) marks the beginning of a new interest in theater by the camp newspaper. Prior to this issue, specifics about particular productions was sporadic, with no cast lists or ticket information ever included. On October 12 the procedure for purchasing tickets was detailed: tickets were 15¢ each and were for sale on October 12 starting at 4 p.m. “This ticket must be taken to the Canal High School office and be exchanged for reserved seat tickets.” On October 14 the Courier identified the color of the ticket to be exchanged: yellow. That issue described the play in more detail: “sissified hero . . . tries to play the role of a great athlete.” The complete cast list was also published. As usual, however, no review was ever offered.

On December 9 Butte High School was preparing for “its first dramatic performance in the new auditorium.” The play, The Other Wise Man, was to be part of a Christmas program including orchestra and choral selections. No director for the play is listed (although the cast is) but the student chairman for the whole program was George Kataoka, “aided by Mildred Zelhoeffer, advisor.” The phrasing of this information should not go unnoticed; it is one of the rare occasions where a Nisei student is given
credit as a coordinator, albeit with a Caucasian advisor, a reversal of the usual phrasing for high school productions wherein Caucasian directors have Nisei assistants.

Subsequent notices in the Courier served as reminders that the play—and only the play was mentioned—was to be produced on December 21 at 8 p.m.; the time was changed to 7:30 p.m. in the December 20 issue. Nothing is known of The Other Wise Man, although a story by that name was written by Henry Van Dyke and dramatized in the 1950s. The Courier notes that this production was “student written,” which suggests that this unnamed student may have based his or her play on the Van Dyke tale.

The December 20 notice also contains a rather poignant appeal:

The public is urged to attend, as it is the desire of the staff to repay the public for the kindness extended to them during the past year.

How exactly this performance, for which attendees had to pay admission, was considered repayment for kindnesses is not clear, but a number of inferences/speculations may be drawn from the statement. First, attendance at previous productions may have failed to meet expectations, a fact which would be troublesome to both the theatrical and religious communities in camp. Second, the relationship between staff and resident at Gila River may have been generally good. Third, the production might help put a positive spin and a sense of closure to another year of confinement. Fourth, both Issei and Nisei seem to have been embraced by the sentiment. Finally, this particular production was most likely audience-centered, that is, its purpose was to entertain and repay spectators rather than to teach drama skills to students or to provide them with an extracurricular activity to combat boredom and frustration. This accounts for the variety of entertainments offered on December 21, even though the play was stressed in newspaper announcements.
Nineteen forty-five marked a very busy year for High School theater as Gila River prepared for closure (officially in November). The Canal Senior class play, Wilbur Braun’s *Merry Death*, was announced in the *Courier* on January 3--only three days before opening. Once again, the paper seemed particularly interested in the production, offering a cast list and ticket information (“white tickets sold by the senior sellers for fifteen cents must be turned in at the Canal High School office for a reserved seat before 4 p.m. Friday, January 5”). The usual 8 p.m. curtain was postponed one half-hour due to “the inductees send-off,” the celebratory farewell for Nisei enlisted men.

On February 28 the Butte Junior class announced its play, Charles George’s *Keep Off the Grass*. The notice in the *Courier* is uncharacteristically light-hearted:

> Are you hoping for a recipe of solid fun? It’s simple. To one ticket to admission to the Butte High School junior class play, “Keep Off the Grass,” add one cup of “corn,” two cups of juvenile talent, and a sprinkle of humor.

In one of the lengthiest notices about theater ever to appear in the *Courier*, the time of the performance (7:30 p.m. on March 2), price of the tickets ($25 for reserved seats, $15 for general admission), director (Rebecca Banks, faculty advisor), Nisei assistants, chairmen of the production committees (publicity, tickets, costumes, make-up), and two seemingly contradictory admonitions to late-comers (“Late arrivals will be seated only between scenes”; “All persons who wish to see the play will not be able to enter between scenes”) were published along with the full cast list.

Like the majority of plays chosen for high school production, *Keep Off the Grass* (1934) is a light-hearted romp about young love. The play takes place in the living room of Rose and Robert Shelly, the parents of two daughters, 21-year-old Joan and 19-year-old Joan...
old Eleanor. Mr. Shelly is an eccentric chemist whose quest is to make ghosts appear through his experiments. In order to make some extra money, Mr. Shelly’s laboratory is rented out as a furnished room to Paul Webster, a young author. This provides the conflict in the play as Joan resents Paul’s presence and Eleanor falls in love with him. Soon Joan falls for Paul as well which causes great concern for her fiancé, Fred Williston. Through the machinations of Eleanor, Joan returns to Fred and Paul becomes Eleanor’s betrothed. The play ends with Mr. Shelly winning a prestigious award for chemistry and a dual wedding on the horizon.

Simple to produce, Keep Off the Grass requires little more than a typical living room set with standard furnishings and a working phone (or a well-timed sound effect). The large cast includes many young friends of the Shelly daughters, characters about the same age as the average Nisei (although somewhat older than the high school juniors producing the play). The use of make-up to transform the 20ish Nisei performers into the 40ish Shellys doesn’t seem to have presented any difficulty, even for the limited resources of a camp theater group. However, one major character, Magnolia Washington, “the colored maid,” may have presented some problems. This “screamingly funny comedy part” (4) is dependent upon its Southern black roots for its efficacy, including a highly stylized dialect: “Ah don’t know. Mis’ Robinson jes’ say fo’ me to come ovah heah and help yo’ all” (10). It is not known how this part was handled in terms of language, and, more importantly, make-up. For the most part, the character of Magnolia is buffoonish, intended to be laughed at rather than with (she has a farcical fear of ghosts, for example). Given the recurrence of camp minstrel shows it appears as
though the oppressed Nisei also welcomed the opportunity to project their frustrations on another target of Caucasian racism, a representation, perhaps, of one of the downsides of a desire to emulate the white majority.

The Butte High School Senior class play, Wilbur Braun’s *Murdered Alive!*, was announced on May 12 with fanfare similar to the notice of the Junior class play:

Have you ever seen a man murdered alive? Have you seen a good mystery comedy lately? You haven’t? Then, come to the senior class presentation, “Murdered Alive,” to be presented Friday, May 18, at the Butte High School auditorium.

Tickets for this exciting, thrill-packed, three-act play are on sale at 30 cents for reserved seats and 20 cents for general admission. Tickets may be purchased from high school students.

Faculty director for the play is Miss Rebecca Banks. Tosh Nakahiro is producer. “Even if you sit in the back row you’ll be able to hear well because of an improved sound system,” says Tosh.

A reminder including a full cast list, performance time (7:30 p.m.), and locations for ticket sales (Canteens 42 and 58) was published on May 16. No reviews for any of the class plays were offered and the *Courier* ceased operations in September.

Once again, a play was chosen which well suited the resources at Gila River. *Murdered Alive!* (1934), a three-act murder mystery, takes place on a single set (the living room of a large estate) and involves the relatives of the recently deceased Marvin Ryder forced to spend a night in his gloomy estate to wait for the reading of his will. The characters are stereotypical, including the brash bumbling detective (Acton Chance, with appropriate punning on his name), the stuffy lawyer (Otis Marvin), bickering married couple (Mr. and Mrs. Frank Backus), and the ingenues who save the day and plan to marry (Arden Ryder and Warner Melton). Perhaps the greatest challenge of this play is its reliance on technical effects to achieve moments of suspense: lights which turn on or...
off suddenly, telephones ringing, doors slamming, sudden disappearances, and slits in scenery from which mysterious hands place or remove various objects throughout the room. None of these present insurmountable problems for even the crudest venue and it is probably safe to assume that the Senior class handled such challenges well.

The sudden and intense interest in theater by the Courier suggests that the activities of camp youth were of great importance to administrators. Support for High School theater was one way that relocation camp life could seem normal and with an eager eye toward the future. The war was just about over, a brave squadron of Nisei became one of the most decorated forces in the European campaign, and only "loyal" citizens remained in camp (the "disloyals" having been sent to Tule Lake). The not entirely trusted Issei became a non-factor as youth, Americanism, and community were stressed.

At this point in my research, too little is known of conditions at Gila River to answer some of the questions posed above without resorting to speculation. The camp as a whole seemed to experiment with various theatrical forms, including original plays ("My Sin"), religious drama, and radio scripts. However, the most compelling aspect of theater at Gila River seems to be the fluidity with which the theater crossed the boundaries of both generation and ethnicity. Added to this mix is the involvement of the WRA, which at present seems to have been one of the more controlling presences at Gila River than at most other camps (in terms of theater specifically). It does seem apparent that as the WRA became a force (again, theatrically) at the camp, theater transformed from the Barrack variety to the High School type. This transformation raises yet another
question: does the imposition of the WRA on the theatrical activities of a camp always lead to a compromise in artistry (that is, that less compelling plays are routinely produced)? On the other hand, it appears as though theater became more vibrant and less experimental when the WRA (and its education policy) seems to have taken control.

Must aesthetics, then, always be such an important factor in determining the success of a theatrical venture at the camps? The answers to these fundamental questions also remain frustratingly unavailable at this time.
NOTES

1. I am, of course, speculating that no theater was ever produced by the Nisei Drama Association, although given the poor coverage of most camp newspapers regarding theater, it is entirely possible that an informal production was offered and never acknowledged.

2. This claim by the Courier has never been substantiated. If untrue, it would not mark the first instance of a camp newspaper exaggerating the importance of a particular play or actor.

3. If the transition from Barrack to High School theater because of a troupe in protest is indeed what occurred at Gila River, it would be quite similar to that which took place at Tule Lake where an “American” Little Theater group was replaced by native Japanese productions and folk practices.

4. The JACL—Japanese American Citizens League—was formed by Nisei in the 1920s and was designed to act as a national organization to address the concerns of the Nisei population, and it was the group most Nisei turned to when the orders to evacuate were posted. However, the JACL cooperated fully with the evacuation, thinking compliance to be a sign of loyalty on the part of Japanese Americans. As a result, interned members of the JACL were resented by some other colonists who found their decision to cooperate to be unconscionable.

5. According to the Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan (1983), Momotaro is of the genre of literature known as Kusazoshi, a type of popular fiction of the Edo period (1600-1868). Stories such as Momotaro appeared in rather cheap editions and were not highly regarded for their literary value. There is no mention of any adaptations for the stage.

6. As noted in other chapters, the camps have a history of minstrel shows supported by Nisei who believed themselves socially superior to blacks. With that mindset, it is conceivable to think that the character of Magnolia would have been a particular source of fun for spectators.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Aside from Tule Lake, Poston remains the most interesting and unique camp in terms of its theatrical practices. Opened May 1942 in Yuma County, Arizona (12 miles south of Parker), the camp housed nearly 18,000 residents by September 1942, making it the largest camp next to Tule Lake. Of course, its 71,000 acres compared with Tule Lake's 7,400 also made it a much less concentrated camp, with presumably less potential for violence than the densely populated Tule Lake. Its inhabitants were primarily all Californians from Salinas, Santa Anita, and Pinedale (Inukai 149) and its major craft, according to Eaton, was diminutive wood carving. Like Gila River, the camp was divided, this time in three, and known simply as Poston I, II, and III (or Unit I, II, and III). Because it was located in the desert, Poston was an extremely hot camp: "Pray God," wrote one resident, "that you won't be sent to Poston" (Eaton 74).

The camp newspaper was the Poston Chronicle, but it was the Official Daily Press Bulletin, published daily (except Monday) by the WRA, which first encouraged theater. The August 5, 1942 issue announced,

DRAMATIC TALENTS WANTED
A call has been sounded for dramatic talents by the Recreation Department.
Those interested persons are asked to report immediately to the Employment Bureau or to Recreation Hall 226 between 9:00 and 12:00 in
the mornings or between 1:00 and 4:00 p.m. in the afternoons. The office will be opened for registration only in the mornings on Saturdays. Positions opened [sic] include scenario writers, costume designers, make-up men, playwrights, artists, actors and actresses. In charge of this division are Jayne Miyake, Happy Okajima and Hiro Fujita. The public is reminded that all work in this division will be compensated.

Those interested in participating in amateur Japanese "shibai" are invited to report to the recreational department where further information is available.

This announcement provides a number of important clues as to operations in the camp, and particularly its approach to theater. First, camp life was highly bureaucratic and structured. Even for entertainment/recreational activities, concerned parties had to "report" at certain predetermined hours for a registration process. Second, the compensation offered (usually $16 per month) sets the stage for a theater beholden to the WRA with the possibility of some type of censorship; it was not the case at any other camp that the Recreation Department directly placed a call for theater participants. Third, the call for scenario writers and playwrights was unique among the camps, although certainly an attempt to keep as many people busy as possible. Finally, while the division is obviously Nisei-run, and it must not be forgotten that Caucasians supervised all aspects of camp life, Poston's administration did attempt to allow the internees (particularly the Nisei) some form of self-government. Lane Hirabayashi remarks in Inside an American Concentration Camp that Poston distinguished itself in that its director, Wade Head, "tried to maximize self-governance in an effort to lessen the effects of alienation," often finding himself at odds with other administrators of the WRA who accused him of deviating from official policy (xxxvii). The three Nisei listed, then, may have been more than mere figureheads.
The Recreation Department’s ambitious theater group enrolled thirty “young people” by August 9. According to a notice in the Bulletin, “[p]lays have been ordered from Los Angeles and the thespians expect to entertain the public before the footlights in the near future.” Through what agency plays were ordered is not clear, nor is it stated who decided what plays to order. It may be inferred also that few or no playwrights enrolled in this initial group of thirty, although other artisans of theater surely did: “The group will design its own settings, costumes and create the needs of their organization.” The group’s proposed self-sufficiency distinguishes it markedly from High School theater which relied on school clubs, and in some cases classroom instruction, to meet the needs of performances. As a result of such self-sufficiency, Nisei theater at Poston most closely resembled Barrack theater, although the apparent administrative control over theater compromises that designation somewhat.

On August 14, Happy Okajima, one of the founders of the aforementioned drama group, announced that William Saroyan’s People With Lights Coming Out of Them, a radio script, was to be presented. In this case, it seems apparent that an actual broadcast was not intended; the Bulletin noted that the play “is to impress the audience that they are listening to a radio program.” Obviously, this was to be a stylized performance with performers holding scripts, sound effects, and, perhaps, an announcer—similar to an actual radio production of the era. The play was presented later in August along with “[a]n old-fashioned melodrama,” Fireman, Save My Child by Ned Albert. Happy Okajima directed both plays which were performed at the Cottonwood Bowl—an outdoor facility used for meetings and shows— at 9 p.m. Intermission featured “a double quartet
in two numbers and Seiji Onishi in a vocal solo.” The *Bulletin* also published a complete cast list in its August 28 issue.

*Fireman, Save My Child* lives up to its billing as a melodrama. The play involves an evil young man, Archibald Quingle, who tries to frame his brother, Chester, and steal his girl, Daisy Dorrance. Fortunately, he is foiled by his virtuous brother who exposes him as a fraud and wins both the girl and the day. The play is extremely simple to stage, making it a perfect vehicle for camp productions. A single living room set is all that is required and the only piece of furniture of importance is a bookcase which contains hidden money (supposedly stolen by Chester) and papers explaining the birth of Archibald; he turns out to be an adopted son of the Quingle family. Perhaps the greatest challenge in this play is characterization. As Ned Albert explains in his “Author’s Note” in the 1937 Samuel French edition,

This is the type of old-fashioned melodrama that must be played with sincerity and great conviction in order to put the ideas across. The instant the players start to burlesque or “kid” the lines and situations the audience will suffer. Do not try to be funny while playing these parts. Let the audience do the laughing, as they will if you are earnest and sincere. (5)

Happy Okajima may have had to work on the stylized dialogue, particularly Daisy’s “No, no, a thousand times no” (30) and Archibald’s evil hissing. The other production elements of the play are quite uncomplicated, particularly since Ned Albert has not left much room for artistic exploration: “All of the stage business for this play has been carefully planned and, if followed thoroughly, will be of great aid to the players and the director” (5).
It is important to emphasize that a Nisei director was common only in camp theater of the Barrack variety which again places Poston a bit further from the High School paradigm. However, in most Barrack theaters—unlike at the High School—Nisei were presumably under no influence from Caucasians (none that is discernable, at least). These August 1942 productions, “sponsored by the Recreation Department,” may have had the controlling hand of the WRA behind their conception and it is possible that Happy Okajima’s direction may very well have been “contaminated” by administrative support.

“Drama Talents Asked to Report Interests” is the curious headline which appeared in the Bulletin’s September 3 issue. It is not clear why another administration-sponsored group was created, unless—as was the case in Gila River—each section of camp was to have its own theater group; in this announcement Poston III is specifically mentioned:

A drama guild consisting of amateur actors, actresses, playwrights and producers will be formed at Poston III, it was announced, if response warrants it. Interested parties were asked to report as soon as possible at the Press Bulletin Office, blk. 317, 8-A & B, between the hours of 9 a.m. and 2 p.m.

An organization meeting will be held in the near future.

As with the original call for theater participants, the highly structured institution that was Poston was echoed in the proposed organization of the new theater group. The term “producers” is also of interest. If the WRA indeed sponsored the drama guild (meeting in the Bulletin’s offices certainly suggests sponsorship; the recreation halls would have suited the purpose, as would a number of other gathering places had the WRA not been
involved), then it would “produce” each play (that is, provide the necessary funds to put on a production). If individual internees were to fund productions, then presumably the administration’s control would be weakened substantially. It is entirely possible that “producers” is either an all-encompassing term for those who will “produce” the performance: scenic artists, make-up persons, costume designers, and the like, or a term which looks good to the untrained eye (which in turn may entice more people to join the group) but is not a practical nor feasible position available in internment camp theater.

Poston III’s drama group remained a viable organization throughout the existence of the camp. On September 11, however, membership seems to have been low and a call for both Nisei and Issei talents was issued; “Final plans for forming a drama guild and the selection of a drama director will be the main business of the evening.” At the same time, Poston I was starting to produce strictly Issei—that is, traditional Japanese—plays, which left Poston III the task of housing the drama group representative of the majority Nisei population for the entire camp (Poston II did not appear to have any theater group at this time).

By September 17 Poston III was still in the planning stages, but making progress:

The newly organized Poston III Drama Club chose Molly Mano as its chairman and temporary head at Tuesday night’s meeting in the Press office.

Until a fully qualified director can be secured, the group will operate under Miss Mano’s directorship. An immediate problem facing the members is the selection of a suitable play which probably will have to come from the pen of a local talent.

Those interested in dramatics or playwriting were asked to contact the chairman as soon as possible.
This notice raises a number of questions, which, given the absence of the voices of those who were there, must remain unanswered (or, answered via speculation). What had become of the group headed by Happy Okajima? What is the difference between a "chairman" and a "head"? What is meant by a "fully qualified director," given that theater was generally not a pursuit of the Nisei and therefore someone with directorial experience would have been difficult to find? Was a Nisei director sought at all or was this group searching for a Caucasian teacher whose qualifications may have been a degree in English or Speech? Did the group mean "director" to be the person who directs a play or was "director" merely synonymous with "chairman" or "head"? Why was a "suitable" play difficult to find? What constitutes "suitable"? Was the problem of play selection one of availability of scripts, lack of membership, or some form of censorship? Would the "local talent" be under the watchful eye of the administration? Why the urgency of this announcement? Ironically, this troupe, comprised presumably of novices, was to produce some of the most original productions of any of the relocation camp theaters.

On September 19, the Bulletin announced the implementation of an unprecedented event in camp theater history (one that would be repeated only at Poston itself): the decision to produce an original play about life at Poston.

CAMP LIFE THEME TO BE USED FOR PLAY
Plays and skits based on camp life were discussed at the meeting of Drama enthusiasts Thursday night at the Press Office. Different settings as the mess hall, press office and etc. were agreed as the most suitable for plays due to the limited facilities. In a discussion on the first play that this group might work on it was decided that the canteen setting would probably be the most suitable.
The relationship between the facilities available to the group and the setting of the original play is not clear from the notice, unless the group envisioned some type of environmental theater scenario. It is also unclear why this group opted for original plays as opposed to established works. What is apparent is the belief that the subject of camp life—and in particular a familiar setting such as the canteen—would bring in an audience. The attitude these plays would take toward their subject is also (at this point) unknown, but if the WRA indeed had a hand in the production of these plays, it is obvious that camp life would be seen only in the finest light.

The whole issue of “camp life” at Poston requires inspection, as well. In September, 1942 Poston had been open only four months (in fact, it was the first to accept residents). Roger Daniels submits that the settling-in process took place over an approximate 10-month period, from spring 1942 to February 1943 (Prisoners 65). In addition, Daniels notes that settling-in occurred twice: first at the assembly centers and then a few months later in the relocation camps. It is not unreasonable to assume that “camp life” had not yet been established by September and original theater may therefore have been a way to guide the process of settling-in, particularly if the administration could persuade theatergoers that camp life was easy to adjust to. In addition, on September 2 Poston reached its peak population of 17,814 (Daniels, Prisoners 131). Even with the huge landscape of Poston (it was the largest camp in terms of area), 18,000 people confined against their will creates conditions of extreme stress. Indeed, by November 1942 Poston suffered a general strike over the beating of a resident. A light-hearted, theatrical look at camp life, guided by the philosophy of community values, may
have been an attempt to contain somehow the tension that was most likely mounting in
the camp.

Mention of a Poston II drama group occurs in the September 24 issue of the
Bulletin, although by comparison it appears that this group did not possess the
organizational proficiency of Unit III's troupe, now labeled the Poston Community
Theatre Guild. The "impromptu talent program," designed to entertain and to "unveil
local talents," was presented in Poston III, ostensibly to increase membership. As noted
in the announcement, "[m]embers of the Unit 2 club also performed on the program."
The lack of specificity as to what types of entertainment/talent appeared makes this a
particularly frustrating notice. Much of the text is devoted to Poston III's troupe and
their indication that "a few of the outstanding talents will probably be seen in
forthcoming skits and dramas to be presented by the Unit 3 organization." These facts
leave a number of impressions, specifically that by culling the best talent from other units
of the camp, Unit III's Community Theatre Guild strove to be not only the best but the
only theater group in Poston. This may reflect an administrative desire to prevent
factions, even in terms of theater, or perhaps the administration wanted a consolidated
theater group in order to prevent the thinning of administrative resources. Whatever the
reason, it seems obvious that Unit III's group was graced with official sanction by the
administration in the official publication of the administration.

On October 15 the Bulletin announced the title of one of the rare original plays
presented by camp theater groups:

The Poston Drama Guild Theatre announced today that their
original 3-act comedy, "Postonese" written and directed by Wilfred
Horiuchi and Teru Shimada, depicting the life of the Japanese evacuees, will soon be presented at the Drama Guild Theatre Stage, located at Blk. 44-14.

Designed by Teru Shimada, and assisted in the building of the stage by the Dramatic Dept., the “show piece” has a synchronized platform, footlights, spotlights, ceiling, and natural wood furniture. Sixty chairs for the audience have been completed with 40 more partially finished.

Unfortunately, no manuscript of “Postonese” is known to exist; it would be of great interest to know what events were included in the depiction of the life of the evacuees, and what the attitude toward these events was. Such revelations would go a long way toward determining to what extent the Drama Guild was controlled by the administration.

From this notice, however, it is apparent that the Barrack theater paradigm was operational at Poston, although given the supposed level of administration control, it may have been more of a hybrid between true Barrack theater (such as what was present at Tule Lake) and pure High School theater (such as at Heart Mountain). For example, the 100-seat audience is typical of Barrack theater while the alleged sponsorship of the administration is more common of High School theater. We know nothing of the age of the particular participants, but it is safe to assume they were Nisei, and therefore uniformly of high school age or slightly older. With school sponsorship replaced by general administrative support, the troupe had to make its own venue. Clearly a great deal of care went into the building of the theater, although it must also be remembered that a great deal of time was afforded the interned. Someone with a good knowledge of the basic requirements of a theater building--designer Teru Shimada perhaps--must have supervised the construction, taking pride in both its achievement as a practical theater space and a work of art (although what is meant by a “synchronized” space is unclear).
On October 26 the Drama Guild unveiled a green neon sign, "said to be the first one of its kind in Poston," at the dedication ceremony for the new theater building (Bulletin, October 28, 1942). It is not known what this sign said. What is also not known is just who comprised the Dramatic Department. It is probable that the Guild itself is meant, but the designation suggests a sub-division of the administration’s Recreation Department (which placed the original call for participants). If so, this is yet another demonstration that the Guild was an arm of the administration and its artistic integrity compromised by that relationship.

On October 27 the Bulletin announced the cast of the play Maizie, another original work, which was presented during the camp’s "County Fair" and "received with great enthusiasm by the Postonians, young and old." Maizie was written and directed by Robert Bud Kinoshita, "a resident of Blk. 46," as were most of the participants. The content of this play remains unknown. What is obvious at this point, however, is that few productions had been presented by the Guild. On November 10 the Bulletin made yet another announcement of the impending production of Postonese, "now in its final practices." Directed by its author, "Wilfred 'Orson Welles' Horiuchi," the play is claimed to be "the first legitimate one in Poston Center, and . . . the first one ever to be presented indoors." The use of the word "legitimate" is curious; what was illegitimate about the August productions of Saroyan's People With Lights Coming Out of Them and Ned Albert's Fireman Save My Child?

The Theatre Guild finished 1942 with no production of Postonese. On November 18 the Unit III troupe presented a vaudeville show featuring skits and a minstrel show,
but no details regarding the skits is offered in the *Bulletin*. Minstrel shows were not uncommon in the camps, finding appreciative audiences among the Japanese.³ Daisuke Kitagawa explains that the Japanese “had an irrational sense of inferiority toward the Caucasian Americans, so he had an even more irrational sense of superiority toward the other ethnic or racial minorities... Inwardly... he was sure that he was far superior to all these groups, and resented being lumped together with them” (18).

In December the transition from Barrack theater to High School theater began. Junko Maruya of the “Dramatics Writing Department” of the Theatre Guild offered a “Radio Drama and Broadcasting Technique” course to high school students. Similarly, Wilfred Horiuchi, the author of *Postonese*, offered “Shakespearean Drama and Stage-Screen Technique.” It is not known where Maruya learned his trade, but Horiuchi was a screen and radio performer before his internment. It is not known how many students, if any, signed up for these courses. It should be noted, however, that Horiuchi’s offering was the only stated Shakespeare course at any camp. On December 15 the *Bulletin* announced Poston’s first Christmas play, *The Town that Couldn’t Have Christmas*, and on the 22nd Unit II’s Drama Guild announced a pageant to be presented on Christmas day. Happy Okajima was slated to direct along with a host of assistants (directors, stage and properties managers, lighting directors), a not uncommon phenomenon in High School theater. The December 25 announcement in the *Chronicle* described the pageant with more detail: “In a specially prepared setting of the Nativity scene, the Christmas story will unfold with the Cathedral Choir of the Poston II Christian Church lending their voices in a choral background.”
Unit II’s Drama Guild was at the time also actively preparing for a New Year’s Festival they entitled “The Cavalcade of Poston.” Reputed to be “funnier than ‘Maisie’” (the spelling of this title alternates in various announcements), the “Cavalcade” was to be presented on a newly-built stage, a 20’ x 55’ stage built in a firebreak. Unit II named this venue the Cottonwood Bowl and transplanted Cottonwood trees from other parts of the camp at its main gate. What this “Cavalcade” included is not known and no review ever appeared in the newspaper. However, given what is known about productions at Poston, it is safe to assume that this “Cavalcade” involved skits depicting camp life. The Chronicle reported that the cast had been seen rehearsing for the show which was not a talent show; a talent show was one of a few other entertainments planned for the festival.

The Drama Guild continued to dominate theater news in the Chronicle for the next few months. Wilfred Horiuchi’s speech and drama classes continued to be announced, as was his class in modern drama. Mr. Horiuchi seemed to turn his attention away from the staging of plays and toward the virtues of public speaking as he and his wife continued to teach and to plan oratorical contests. Using speeches in plays as models, Horiuchi claimed that “students [were] being taught the difference between good and bad speakers” (Chronicle, Jan. 8, 1943).

A lengthy announcement concerning theater appeared in the January 12 issue of the Chronicle:

Under the supervision of Teru Shimada, former Production Mgr. Of the Drama Guild, a stage is being completed at the D end of the Drama Bldg., 44-14. Measuring about 20’ x 16’ the stage will probably feel first the feet of the actors who will present the much-advertised production “Postonese,” but is open to use for other nisei drama activities.
"We don't know anything about building a stage--it isn't in our line," said Mr. Shimada, "but we are forced to do it because this is Poston." Ingenious features back-stage are a rainstorm machine complete with thunder and a dust-storm contraption.

At present the Drama Guild is at work on a pulley curtain and the stage is partially set for its first production. It will probably be some time, though, before the play is enacted, Mr. Shimada said, because former actors have gone into other fields and re-casting is necessary. High school students would probably portray the roles, he added.

This notice is significant in quite a few ways and raises yet another set of questions. For instance, what became of the "synchronized platform" noted in the October 15 issue of the Chronicle? Why did Teru Shimada, who on October 15 was credited with the design of the theater at 44-14 (as well as assisting in its building), claim to have no knowledge of the craft of stage-building? Who "forced" the Guild to build the stage and why? What does Mr. Shimada mean by "this is Poston"? Was he suggesting that the administration decided the stage had to be built (despite the fact that one existed already)? Do his comments provide clues into the level of administrative control over the Nisei Guild members? Why was special effects machinery added and what plans were made for their use?

The machinery and the proposed pulley system are further indications (as was the plan to produce original plays) that theater at Poston was always rather ambitious. However, this notice also demonstrates that major changes were in store for the Guild. As suggested earlier, the once predominantly Barrack-type theater was slowly becoming High School-based. While the venue for productions at Unit II apparently would still be a barrack, the above announcement serves as notice that acting chores would fall on the
shoulders of high school students. In addition, this implies that the Guild was previously made up of Nisei who were perhaps somewhat older than high school age.

One cannot help but feel a sense of frustration involving the Guild, although none is explicitly stated (Shimada’s remarks are quite telling, though). Attempts to produce exciting and challenging theater seems to have been at times thwarted by administration decisions, either to build a new stage or to release Nisei pursuing an education or service in the armed forces. The original Postonese hung over the heads of Guild members for months while delays of various sorts prevented production. Indeed, on January 14, 1943 the Guild announced that “[a]fter the presentation of ‘Postonese,’ the Drama Guild will not undertake any new work of its own initiative, but will be willing to help any group wanting to put on plays or oratorical contests.” Apparently, Postonese was an event with which the Guild was not willing to part, and to that end the Guild published bulletins in the Chronicle repeatedly, updating the populace on the status of the production. On February 25 Wilfred Horiuchi placed a call for actors, particularly men, and also revealed that Act 2 of Postonese had been rehearsed. On March 3 additional try-outs for Postonese roles were announced along with the notification that “Unit II dramatists will also be present at the meeting and [will?] participate in the comedy drama which will be presented in April as a Red Cross benefit performance.” The March 23 issue of the Chronicle noted that Postonese rehearsals were “continuing regularly every Thurs. with Unit II dramatists in attendance.” The emphasis on the participation of playwrights suggests that the play was being re-written on a regular basis. If this is indeed the case, was it because the administration had to approve the final script? Was the Guild being
overly cautious or responding to the demands of camp management (who may also have been behind the Red Cross benefit referred to)? In addition, it is unclear if the “comedy drama” mentioned in the announcement is indeed Postonese, but if it is then the genre label ascribed to it is worthy of consideration. How was the Guild using genre in this instance? Is “drama” being used in the broad sense (i.e., a play) or was it meant to contrast with “comedy”? Was the play therefore some kind of mixed genre presentation and were objections by the administration, if any, because of the more serious aspects of the script? Unfortunately, questions and speculations are at present the only legacy of Postonese. The play itself never was performed.

At about the same time that the Guild was reportedly rehearsing Postonese, the high schools themselves were getting involved with theater. On January 16 the following announcement appeared in the Chronicle:

HIGH SCHOOL PLAY PLANNED
The Junior Class will probably be the first to present a Poston high school play. It has enlisted the aid of the Drama Guild, and Junko Maruya will serve as assistant director of the short play and several comedy skits while Wilfred Horiuchi will supervise.

It is expected that a Junior Class committee will choose the drama soon, and the first collaboration between the Drama Guild and a Poston dramatic activity will begin.

By March 23 the Junior Class still had not chosen a play, but promised a “legitimate stage play . . . and a short skit which will probably be put on at the Jr.-Sr. Prom.” The reason behind the delay in choosing a play is not known, but the high school situation seems to parallel that of the Drama Guild: for some reason theatrical productions had difficulty being mounted at Poston. Another case in point involves the Senior Class of Unit I. On November 11 their “drama club,” The Masqueraders, announced plans to
present a comedy entitled *Porter, Please!* at the hospital auditorium November 26 and 27. Like *Postonese, Porter, Please!* was to be an original production about camp life: “a hectic satire on relocation, recounting the adventures of two young Postonese who venture out into the great, wide, beautiful world.” A notice on November 28 advised that the production was postponed due to exams. The new performance dates were to be December 10 and 11. However, the play was never produced (or, if it was, no record of it exists in the Chronicle). Had *Porter, Please!* been performed it would have been a unique presentation for a camp high school.

Two plays did enjoy a performance at Poston before the end of 1943. On April 10 a version of Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* was presented for grammar school children at the Drama Guild theater. According to the April 17 Chronicle, some 300 children attended. On December 18 the *Chronicle* announced the upcoming performance of Murion Weser's *And the Angels Said* by members of the Junior Christian Youth Fellowship. The question remains: why were *Hansel and Gretel* and *And the Angels Said* able to be staged? The answer may lie in the fact that these productions were under the direct auspices of the administration. *Hansel and Gretel*, for instance, was presented by the “Girls' Group Work Division of the Rec[reation] Dept.” This division included members of the YWCA and the Girls' Athletic Division. Given what is known about the troubles of the Drama Guild and the High School classes, it appears as though the administration put its weight behind theatrical endeavors which were both under its direct control and not a challenge to its authority. We may surmise that original plays were not to the liking of the administration--because of possible “subversive” segments?--and as a
result performers were subjected to techniques designed to stall and eventually derail the productions (such as the insistence on the building of a new stage). Future events at Poston support this inference.

Despite what appears to be general administrative reluctance to support theater, the fact is that it may have only been certain types of theater which were taboo at Poston (such as original scenes of camp life). The administration sanctioned the construction of new theatrical venues. For example, Unit III's amphitheatre was to be rebuilt, according to an August 20 article in the Chronicle:

The Unit III stage of the proposed civic amphitheatre is to be reconstructed with concrete foundation, according to Gerald Wumino, General Chairman for the construction of Poston Square Garden.

The new plan, now being drawn up, calls for the building of additional rooms, under the platform for make-up and rehearsing. When the project is completed, it is to be equipped with a proper drainage system so as to avoid any similar destruction as that which was caused by the recent storm.

Work on the stage will be resumed as soon as the present flooded condition is remedied.

It is not known at this time what is meant by “the recent storm,” nor its severity (was this more of a dust storm—a much more common occurrence in the desert).

By January 13, 1944 “Poston Square Garden” was finished. The theater sported innovations not found at any other venue at a relocation camp. For instance, the stage was completely wired for electricity; behind the stage a 25' x 40' dressing room was built, complete with plasterboard walls; a small upstairs portion was “where actors will be situated.” The stage itself measured 40' x 40' with 5-foot wide halls on each side and built on concrete foundations. According to the Chronicle, the “Garden,” located between the firebreaks of Units I and III, was completed in time for the “New Years [sic]
all unit drama performance," apparently an attempt to involve the whole camp in what was previously a venture only Unit II took part in conscientiously. The January 27 Chronicle noted that a 7-foot wall was to be built around the theater which, the announcement stated, had three entrances and a seating capacity of 4,000.

Curiously, the new theater--reported to be completed in January--did not officially open until April. According to an April 13 article, the cream-colored plasterboard theater was built for movies, music, dance, and Japanese-language plays. In other words, “Poston Square Garden” became a center for Issei drama, which was presented out of doors at most camps. It is not known why so many camp resources went toward supporting Issei activities since administrations at all camps tended to elevate the stature of the Nisei. Prior to the internments, the Issei dominated Japanese affairs, but the camps, by virtue of their efforts at community-building among citizens, relinquished power from the Issei and bestowed it on the Nisei. As Harry H. L. Kitano explains,

Financial ruin, together with the camp policies of using American citizens (Nisei) in positions of camp responsibility, worked to shift power and influence away from the Issei and onto the shoulders of the Nisei. This exerted a definite influence on the structure of the Japanese family and operated to free the Nisei from Issei influence. (75)

It is true that “Poston Square Garden” was also a place for Japanese of both generations to gather (to view movies, for example), but artistic activities such as theater, music, and dance tended to be played before specific audiences of either Nisei or Issei (High School theater was an exception). The “Garden” seems a rather large undertaking in support of the Issei who were not in positions of power or influence at the camps, nor in whom the success of assimilation rested.
From March through June 1944, theater at Poston was strictly of the High School variety. The Junior Class play of the Unit I high school, *What a Life* by Clifford Goldsmith, was announced on March 7 and again on March 9. This three-act comedy about high school students was mounted to help finance the Junior/Senior Prom. Aurania Rouverol's perennial favorite, *Growing Pains*, was announced on March 23 by the Poston I high school dramatic club. Ticket prices for this show were 25¢ for general admission and 35¢ for reserved seats. At Unit II's high school, the Junior and Senior class pooled their talents in a production of *Ever Since Eve*, "a lovable, laughable show" (*Chronicle* March 23, 1944). Tickets for this production were 20¢ each. It is not known why admission prices were not standardized among the three units. Most likely, competition among the units was not a factor. The typical "review" of *Ever Since Eve* appeared on April 8, featuring a cast and crew list (the faculty cast director was Miss Joan Smith), and the standard praise of the acting: "superb was the word which could justly describe their acting." On June 1 the *Chronicle* offered a "review" of a play previously not announced. *Spring Fever*, a three-act comedy, was presented by the "Class of '44" of Unit III. Once again, the cast and crew were listed, as were the two faculty directors, Mrs. Fred Green and Mr. Vernon Olson.

Theater took yet another odd turn at Poston in August of 1944. On August 22 the *Chronicle* announced a new production:

**HOSPITAL SERVICES TO BE DRAMATIZED IN SKIT**

A dramatic program will be presented by members of the hospital and education staffs, featuring dramatizations of the various services which the hospital gives.
Unfortunately, very little is known about this presentation entitled *One Day in Poston Hospital*. The episodes included visits to the Emergency Room, Nursery, wards, and the Operating Room. The venue of the first performances is not known, nor is how the various scenes were staged (was a type of environmental theater performed at the hospital itself, for example?). Apparently, the dramatizations were to be instructive but it is indeed peculiar that such instruction was first offered so late into the camp’s existence when its population had decreased considerably. Given that the hospital and education staff served as actors, it can be inferred that the aesthetics of performance were of little importance—the message was everything. As the *Chronicle* relates, the production was successful and deemed so important that it went on tour throughout the camp. Repeat performances were held at “Poston Square Garden” (Unit III) and at the “Cottonwood Bowl” (between Units I and II).

After the performances of *One Day in Poston Hospital*, High School theater returned to Poston. The Poston High School (Poston I) Junior class announced its Christmas play on December 14. The unnamed show was to be performed twice on Christmas day: a matinee at 1:45 pm which cost 15¢, and an evening performance at 7:30 pm which cost 25¢. The Senior class of Poston III decided upon a mystery, *The Tiger House*, for its play. A review of this production appeared in the February 3 issue of the *Chronicle*; it featured a rare glimpse inside the theater and offered descriptions of the stage effects used in *The Tiger House*:

"Presenting the first play to be given this year in Camp III, the senior class of Parker Valley High [ie, Unit III’s high school] presented “Tiger House” [sic] Monday and Tuesday, Jan 29 and 30 respectively at"
the high school auditorium. Although the acoustics sometimes made hearing hard, the seniors capably carried their roles in the three-act play.

The play concerns a mystery mansion located two miles from the nearest village, inherited by Erma Laurie whose role was justly played by Mary Arata. Broken at intervals throughout the play by the going out of the lights, and the shining of the lamp and the green of the portrait over the fireplace with secret passage ways gulping up different unfortunate individuals, the play was thrill-packed.

A cast list followed, as did credit given to the “advisors” for the play, Helen Ellis and George Jackson. In May 1945 the Intermediate Girl Scouts presented a comedy, *Professor, How Could You?* at the high school auditorium—the last high school production at Poston.

The final play presented at Poston was first announced in the June 13, 1945 issue of the *Chronicle*:

**POSTON PLAY SLATED**

Rehearsals for the all-Poston play “Sandstorms and Stars” will be held all this week in the high school auditorium every morning from 9-11 and each evening from 6:30-10. Rehearsals are also being held in the afternoons at Camps II and III.

Said to “highlight experiences of all three camps,” the play was to be given in the high school auditorium of Unit I on the evening of June 22. After years of trying with the aborted *Postonese*, a play about camp life at Poston finally hit the boards. So important was this production that it made the headline of the June 20 issue of the *Chronicle*, the only time in camp theater history that a theater-related event did so:

**DRAMA DEPICTING POSTON LIFE TO BE PRESENTED FRIDAY**

Hollywood Star Will Act in Presentation

“That’s not funny[,] that’s Poston,” says the director of Poston played by John Burdick in the show “Sandstorm and Stars” which will be given in Poston I at the Block 4 Stage at 8:45 o’clock Friday evening.

This play will present a Hollywood star arriving for the occasion, according to Ethel Beam, director of the play, who will not reveal the
identity of the person.

For three weeks evacuees in each of the three camps have gathered together and discussed material which should be included in a true portrayal of the events and happenings in the three-year life at Poston. It is an evacuees’ [sic] story, not Caucasians’, the material has been gathered by the evacuees, and it is all true, says Miss Beam. During the last week, rehearsals for “Sandstorm and Stars,” have been held in all three camps, she said. This week the actors from the three camps will come to Poston I to finish rehearsals for the Friday night performance.

The purpose of the play is to help dramatize the history of Poston. Among the attractions to be presented are: not just one Santa Claus, but two, to play a part in the Christmas scene in Unit II; an original song about the life of Poston; specialty number on baishakunin; and the only alive horse in all Poston in person or in horse.

There will be no admission charge. Camps I, II, and III are represented, and actors are from all three camps.

A lengthy cast list followed the above description.

Clearly, the presentation of this play was meant to bring enjoyment to the evacuees, but the stated purpose— to “dramatize the history of Poston”—suggests an attempt to come to terms with the meaning of the internment at Poston. Since no copy of Sandstorm and Stars is known to exist, we are left to speculate as to how the scenes were portrayed. The timing of the production, and the fact that it was indeed produced, may suggest answers to these questions. With the war nearly over and the camp soon to close (it did on November 28), the remaining internees looked forward to freedom in a country celebrating victory. Perhaps it is with a sense of hope and optimism that the developers of Sandstorm and Stars—unlike, perhaps, those at work on Postonese—could present a touching and comic look at Poston, with nothing more negative than reference to the inconveniences of life in the desert (the “sandstorms” of the title). We might have a
clearer picture of the tone of the play had we some knowledge of how the Caucasian cast
member, John Burdick, played his role.

The one-time performance was offered on June 22, but the *Chronicle* did not offer
a review until the 27th. Once again, the play earned a position on the front page:

CAPACITY CROWD SEES PLAY DEPICTING POSTON
An audience estimated to be at least 5,000 persons [copy illegible]
“Sandstorm and Stars,” the people’s play, depicting the life of Poston,
which was held at the Block 4 Stage last Friday night.

The play, written and directed by Ethel Beam, was supported by a
cast of approximately 100 persons from Units I, II, and III, including a
“Hollywood star.”

The performance opened with a quintet singing a song, “Goodbye
Poston,” written by Bob Okazaki, the “Jack of all trades,” followed by the
evacuees arriving in camp from Bakersfield, one of the first groups to
arrive here originally amid the heat and dust. The play was filled with
many highlights and happenings of the camp life including the Water
Festival, Christmas in Camp II, opening of the Unit III plunge, and the
Youth Conference.

Japanese classical dancers from Camp III performed. Also, a
jitterbug contest was held which was judged by the applause of the
audience, and the winners Tomi Fukuda of Unit I and Ben Yasutomi
Uyede of Unit III, receiving a “loving cup” from John Burdick, who acted
as Wade Head, the former project director in the play.

Jackie Lipian, the sign poster who hit his finger occasionally [sic],
and Yoneichi Asami of Unit III, the man who was in search of a broom, a
wife, and a garden, were the comical characters of the play.

This review is particularly valuable because it provides some account of what the
presentation of *Sandstorm and Stars* looked like. Apparently, the event was more than
skits and the whole production seems to have been a sort of cabaret. The addition of the
classical Japanese dancers suggests an all-inclusive production, spanning not just the
three camps but also the two generations of evacuees. Just who the “Hollywood star”
was who participated in the production is not known. It is curious that such information
was not included after the play was presented.
The two most interesting pieces of information in the June 27 review are the label given to the production—"the people’s play"—and the fact that a Caucasian is given credit as the play’s author. Given what is known of theater at Poston and its many attempts to present original work written by Japanese, it is somewhat dissatisfying to note that even in this last event before the closing of the camp, the Caucasians still appeared to control all aspects of camp life. How could *Sandstorm and Stars* ever truly be "the people’s play" if Caucasians determined what scenes to include and how they were to be depicted? As with most everything else theatrical at Poston, artistic integrity may have been compromised by the presence and direct involvement of the Caucasian administration.

It appears as though theater at Poston remained in a state of flux throughout the existence of the camp. Responsibility for theater at the camp was never successfully shuffled among its three units, and theater always remained a hybrid between Barrack and High School, although resembling Barrack in most respects. I believe that the level of administrative control was directly responsible and this in turn points in part to the battle of wills waged between Wade Head and the WRA, mentioned above. Because the general issue of self-governance was not fully resolved at Poston (or, at least, resolved enough to allow the smooth and simple operation of camp government), the role of theater was similarly left to flounder. The specific shape which theater did assume at Poston may somehow have metaphorically symbolized the condition of the interned vis a vis the administration. That is, as internees enjoyed the "freedom" to produce plays in a barrack, the administration seemed to clamp down with new restrictions and/or directives (such as to build a new stage); in such a situation, the high school, established as an arm
of camp government, seemed a more logical place to center theatrical activity. As the camp neared closing, however, “freedom” returned, making Barrack theater viable once again. Ultimately, the battle for control at Poston created a series of conflicts worthy of the best the theater has to offer.
NOTES

1. Lane Ryo Hirabayashi’s *Inside an American Concentration Camp* (1995), an edition of internee Richard S. Nishimoto’s writings while at Poston, discusses and charts the highly structured Poston I government, developed after the November 1942 general strike at the camp. Divided into a Legislative and Administrative branch, the camp delegated power from the Project Director down to the residents in a system meant to parallel American democracy. “Politics in Poston,” writes Hirabayashi, “were especially complex” (xxxv).

2. There is some confusion regarding the Cottonwood Bowl, although I may very well be the source of the confusion. The facility was mentioned in the *Chronicle* in August 1942 and so it was assumed to be an established structure with the clever name of “Cottonwood Bowl.” However, references to this facility as a brand new venue being built for shows and community gatherings appear in December 1942 (including the transplanting of cottonwood trees from other areas of the camp). In addition, and to add to the confusion, this new venue was located in Camp II, although photographs in Paul Bailey’s *City in the Sun* (1971) and Lane Hirabayashi’s *Inside an American Concentration Camp* (1995) clearly document the existence of a large outdoor theater, identified as being located in Unit I. My guess is that the outdoor theater of Unit I, known as the Cottonwood Bowl, was later reconstructed and placed closer to Unit II with no change in name.

3. Black immigrants enjoyed citizenship in the United States while Asians did not, thus via a sort of cultural hierarchy, the Japanese were “lower” than the blacks they poked fun at in the minstrel shows, although the Japanese did not see it that way.

4. Camp newspaper headlines most often alerted readers to changes in camp policy or procedure (the registration details, for instance), or details from the war, particularly as they related to Nisei in the armed forces or the state of the internments. Therefore, a headline concerning a cultural event such as a play was rare indeed.


CHAPTER 5

GRANADA:

ROBERT DIERLAM'S INNOVATIVE TROUPE

Located 140 miles east of Pueblo, Colorado, Granada's 10,500 acres housed the fewest internees of any camp: approximately 7,300 at its peak. Residents arrived in late August of 1942, with the entire camp population coming from California. According to Allen Eaton, Granada (aka Amache) distinguished itself in terms of the visual arts via Bon-kei, or miniature landscapes; wood carving was also very popular. Granada also distinguished itself as a rather peaceful camp, even during the anxious time of the registration. Approximately 2% of the total camp population over 17 years of age answered in the negative to the loyalty questions, that is, that they would not swear allegiance to the United States and/or fight for the country. Granada’s 2% was the lowest percentage of “disloyals” at any camp (Thomas and Nishimoto 62).

Theater thrived at Granada, much as it did at Gila River or Heart Mountain: based at the high school and administered by Caucasian teachers. However, theater was somewhat of a hybrid at the camp, for the plays chosen for performance were more sophisticated than traditional high school fare. This is largely due to the perceptive Mr. Robert Dierlam, Amache High School English teacher, who directed the theater group through a rather interesting and eclectic repertory.
Deborah Gesensway and Mindy Roseman's *Beyond Words* (1987) includes the artwork and biography of Granada internee Lili Yuri Sasaki, a woman who remembers both the plays and Robert Dierlam well. Interestingly, Sasaki volunteered to enter camp, even though she had the opportunity to join her husband in Cincinnati. When asked why, she responded,

> Why shouldn’t I? I knew it would be such a historical thing... I stayed back in Los Angeles to get in to see what it was like. I went in with my in-laws. When I was 17 I left home and lived as what you call a “schoolgirl” in a Caucasian home. I wanted to know what it was like to live among Japanese for a change. We never lived in “Japanese town.”

(September 10, 1994)

Sasaki’s zeal to enter camp seems curious, although she claims to have known a number of fellow internees who shared a similar quest for adventure. The fact is, though, that she harbored the same fears that nearly every Nisei did upon his or her evacuation:

> I was glad I went in, although it was hard. It was disgusting to think the reason why we were there. If it wasn’t for that reason we could have had a good time without thinking because we didn’t know whether we’re all going to be shot and put in the, some people said, put them all in the Pacific Ocean or send them all back to Japan. What’s going to happen to all the things we had? We didn’t know that and that was terrible.

(September 10, 1994)

Once established at Granada, Sasaki found camp life fun what with numerous socials, dances, and the like. Together with her sister-in-law, Tazi (with whom she lived), theater became one of the activities which contributed to her sense of contentment.

The first notice of theater at Granada appeared in the camp newspaper, the *Granada Pioneer*, on November 4, 1942:

> A meeting of the Amache Little Theater group will be held 6:30 p.m. tomorrow in 8H-6D. Robert Dierlan [sic] will direct the group.
The group seems to have been established at this point as no initial call for members appeared in the newspaper. According to a camp map provided for new arrivals in the newspaper, 8H was a school. Therefore, like other non-Barrack theater groups, this Little Theatre\(^2\) was high school-based, under the auspices of the WRA, and directed by a Caucasian. Yet, this group operated more as a drama club than a dramatics class. It performed a mix of one-act and full-length plays of various genres which indicates a desire to reach an audience broader than simply the high school crowd. Its leader, Robert Dierlam, seemed to sense a two-fold need for theater among the internees: as a psychological release and as means to cultivate the arts. When asked if theater was important psychologically and culturally to the interned, Dierlam responded, “Oh, I should say it was! Because there was much squalor in their lives at the time.” Dierlam appears to have been passionately involved with theater in that he sensed the cultural, psychological, and aesthetic need for theater over its value as entertainment or as an extracurricular activity. His sensitivity to the aesthetics of theater was echoed only by the Nisei at other camps who controlled theaters in barracks.

Robert Dierlam got his job as an English teacher and librarian for the Amache High School through the placement service of the University of Colorado. As camp librarian, he had access to numerous plays; as director of the Little Theatre, he chose the plays for performance from those available in the library. Based on the information available about theater in the *Pioneer*, Dierlam seems to have kept his drama group busy during his tenure at Granada, which lasted until early in 1944. Both Lili and Tazi Sasaki remember him fondly:
Tazi and I always found his presence a great source of entertainment, his every move "cute" in some manner. He was good to us--seriously conscientious--yet so amusing. We liked him.

Dierlam also handled publicity for the Little Theatre, announcing the plays in the *Pioneer* well in advance of performance. On November 14, the following notice appeared:

**LITTLE THEATRE PLANS PLAYS**

The Amache Little Theatre group met Thursday night in 8H-6D and completed plans for two one-act plays to be presented at Terry Hall within a few weeks. A light comedy and a serious drama were chosen. The present cast for the comedy include Cherry Yoshitomi, Tazi Sasaki, Ann Inouye, Marvin Kimura, and George Yoshida. Those interested in taking part in the serious play are asked to be present at 8H-6D, Tuesday at 6:30 pm.

Memberships for stage, business, property and costume committees are also open, according to Director Robert Dierlan [sic].

This type of announcement is atypical of those at other camps. Information seems to be leaked rather systematically to the public, perhaps as a means of sustaining interest in the theater (or perhaps because the plays themselves were not chosen, only the genres to be presented). It is apparent from this notice that the Little Theatre was in need of participants, both actors and crew, and this was a condition which hampered Robert Dierlam's efforts at every production. He recalls that no auditions were held for the shows: "There weren't enough students to do that." Parts were given to those willing to perform, so it is obvious that Dierlam did not run his high school-based troupe in a manner similar to other Caucasian teacher/directors who made participation in theater dependent upon a grade. In this regard, he may have set himself apart from the general policies of the WRA where a type of forced acculturation was implemented in the educational system. Dierlam may have placed a higher priority on education in theater
for those who truly desired such an education. It appears as though he preferred to work with a handful of willing students than an entire class of reluctant participants.

On December 5 some more information was provided in the Pioneer; the one-act plays were to be performed on December 16 and 17. However, the titles of these plays were to be “released at a later date.” This notice also served to recruit more participants for the “business, property, or stage committee[s].” By December 12, enough volunteers made the business and stage committees viable. Each committee was supervised by a Nisei student who had three or four assistants under him or her. Only two members seemed to have volunteered to handle costumes, and both of these students—Tazi Sasaki and Cherry Yoshitomi—were also cast as actors.

The Pioneer printed another notice of the Little Theatre’s activities on December 16, the day of their debut:

The Amache Little Theater will make its debut with two one-act plays tonight in Terry Hall. Curtain time will be at 7:30 pm. A repeat performance will be given tomorrow. Lack of proper arrangements has necessitated the use of central staging and hence seats will be limited to 150 persons for each presentation. A limited number of tickets still may be purchased from Little Theater members for tomorrow’s show.

Amazingly, the group still refused to mention what shows were on the bill, at least in the newspaper. It is unknown by me if the plays were a tightly held secret or if word of mouth had made the titles known to the camp population. Still, it is curious that the plays were never mentioned by name until after they had been performed. As for the collegiate-sounding Terry Hall, Lili Sasaki does not remember the theater being so named, nor can she suggest who it might have been named for.
While I am not certain what is meant by the “lack of proper arrangements,” central staging became a mainstay at Granada. Lili Sasaki remembers this staging clearly, and her description sounds familiar to what we refer to as “theater in the round”:

That was the “in” thing, it had just started. You’re not supposed to put scenery or anything on the stage on the side of everyone, but put it in the center and all the people sit around it. Like a boxing ring!

Apparently, this type of staging was a concession made because of the limited resources of the Little Theatre. Creative blocking may have been Dierlam’s only alternative to compensate for the limited resources and the general unfamiliarity regarding the practical theater and its requirements which confronted him. This is yet another indication of the ingenuity of Robert Dierlam’s tutelage.

As for the theater itself, Lili Sasaki remembers a mess hall used for that purpose. This is not an uncommon phenomenon at the camps. Although recreation halls were, as their name implies, set aside for such activities, internees often sought other venues for particular events. Sasaki recalls that the mess halls at Granada were also used for dances. There was, however, no structure known as the theater. “They did make a makeshift stage,” claims Sasaki, “a funny little, small stage” which, she recalls, was also used by the Issei. Robert Dierlam describes the theater as a “temporary construction,” but such was the case with every building at the internment camps. He recalls the stage being built by the administration, with props and make-up provided by the WRA as well. It has not yet been established by me if the administration indeed provided such items outright, or if money collected from ticket sales paid for whatever was requested by the Little

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Theatre (which was the case at other camps, particularly those which were home to Barrack theaters).

A “review” typical of most camp newspapers appeared in the Pioneer on December 19:

PLAYERS DEBUT A SUCCESS

Appreciative audiences greeted the first production of the Amache Little Theater, Wednesday and Thursday evenings at Terry Hall.

“The Trysting Place,” a comedy by Booth Tarkington, featured Kenji Okuda, Tazi Sasaki, Cherry Yoshitomi, and Roy Hamaji.

“Rehearsal,” Christopher Morley’s satire on Irish plays, included Shizuka Fukuda, Cowl Takano, Joy Takeyama, June Suzuki, Ida Nakashima, and Jane Shimada. Both plays were directed by Robert Dierlam.

Also aiding in the presentations were Julia Tanji, Harry Fukusawa, Frances Furukawa, Elma Amamoto, and Tad Murakami.

This cast list offers little in the way of audience response other than “appreciative,” which might be translated as enthusiastic or politely indifferent. Lili Sasaki recalls being somewhat bored by the plays but attended “all because of Dierlam and my friends that were in it.” As for the rest of the audience, Sasaki remembers them being very curious and quiet, with limited applause. And, she adds, they were all Nisei: “the people that went to the plays were more or less the people who loved to read books. And, they wanted to bend over backwards to be nice to the Caucasians, too.” The implication here is that the Caucasians had a stake in the success of the Little Theatre’s efforts, but it is not clear whether by “Caucasians” she means the WRA or, simply, kindly teachers like Robert Dierlam. Although Dierlam worked for the WRA it does not appear that he came to embody the administration in the minds of the internees who knew him.

Sasaki also implies that an effort was made to appease the Caucasians (no matter who they were) which is consistent with Japanese attitudes toward assimilation.
However, if the rather bland response of the camp newspaper, and its reporting of an equally uninterested audience, is to be taken as truth, then it is also apparent that Dierlam's own efforts to acculturate through theater were not very successful. In retrospect, of all the camp theater groups--High School or (especially) Barrack--the Amache Little Theatre presented the most ambitious repertory. Despite less than exemplary resources and performer know-how, Robert Dierlam chose some plays which presented many difficulties, including staging, costuming, and dialect. In terms of spectatorship, perhaps it was Dierlam's mistake to offer such eclectic and complex productions. If similar problems at other camps are any indication, even the unacculturated Nisei audiences were resistant to unpolished performances; the more difficult the productions--given inexperienced actors and poor resources--the greater the possibility for amateurish results.4

"[A]s far as the setting is concerned," the author of Rehearsal contends, "[the play is] the easiest play to produce that you ever heard of. It requires only a bare stage, several plain chairs, and a small table" (35). Such requirements no doubt would be appealing to any camp theater group, but ironically the play may be considered a curious choice for Robert Dierlam who claimed to have had to resort to central staging to compensate for a "lack of proper arrangements." The play is actually a play about putting on a play, and as its title indicates, a rehearsal makes up the action. Morley's script is somewhat metatheatrical, with its humor derived from complaints by the participants about the play they are rehearsing: "I wish you'd picked out some other play; this is so dreadfully gloomy. It'll put the audience into a morbid melancholy" (37), and

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from the satire on Irish plays themselves. It is not unreasonable to assume, therefore, that
the nuances of this one-act were lost on the generally unacculturated Nisei audience,
who, even if they were regular theatergoers, did not possess the cultural know-how to
understand the nature of Morley’s satire. It is therefore possible that their response to the
play, translated by the Pioneer as “appreciative,” may well have been polite indifference
as a result of a cultural gap. Dierlam, however, may have been counting on his audience
to agree with Morley’s Freda who remarks, “Who ever heard of a one-act play with any
fun in it? They don’t write ‘em. A one-act play has to be artistic—” (52). Rehearsal
also features an all-female cast (“equally valid for girls’ schools or clubs of high-spirited
ladies,” the author remarks), which suggests that Dierlam chose the play to fit his
available actors.

Booth Tarkington’s The Trysting Place (1921), as its title implies, is a play about
a particular place: the lobby of a hotel, “one of those vast and elaborate houses of
entertainment” (201). The play involves a family (mother, daughter, and son) who each
have a secret rendezvous with his or her lover in the hotel lobby. As the action
progresses, the son winds up hiding under a settee, the daughter’s lover behind a chair,
and a mysterious voice complains to all of them from somewhere in the lobby (chosen by
each couple because it is the quietest place in the hotel). These farcical elements of The
Trysting Place certainly presented Robert Dierlam with staging difficulties, particularly
since it was his decision to stage the production centrally. For example, the script calls
for one of the lovers to remain unseen by both the characters and the audience, a daunting
task in the round.
The Trysting Place is clearly a comedy, so the Pioneer’s announcement that a comedy and a “serious drama” were chosen for the Little Theatre’s debut is somewhat misleading. It is doubtful that the satirical Rehearsal would be considered a serious drama, so it is possible that Dierlam changed the plays he originally planned to produce to suit the talent he had available. Perhaps this is why he chose not to announce the names of the plays in the Pioneer (although it does not explain why the titles were still not offered on the day of their debut).

Robert Dierlam’s next production initiated on January 16, 1943:

PLAY TRY-OUTS TO BE WEDNESDAY
Try-outs for a one-act farce will be held by the Amache Little Theater group, Wednesday, 6:30 p.m. at 8H-12E. Interested persons are invited to attend.

This brief notice implies a number of things about this point in the existence of the Little Theatre. First, Dierlam still hoped to cast plays through auditions (as mentioned, his later statements proved he was largely unable to). Second, there was no set group of participants; those recruited for the first bill of plays may have participated only for something to do. An example would be Tazi Sasaki who, thinking it might be fun, joined the group as an actress and costume designer. Ms. Sasaki did not participate in any other productions at Granada. Finally, it may be inferred that although a farce was said to be chosen, it is possible that once again only the genre was selected—perhaps because semi-farcical The Trysting Place was more favorably received than Rehearsal. Support for this assertion comes from the next notice of the Little Theatre’s activities, January 21; a meeting was planned where “plays would be read.”
On February 20, Robert Dierlam announced the presentation of two one-act plays, Louis N. Parker’s *A Minuet* and E.P. Conkle’s *Sparkin*. It is not known what happened to the farce planned in late January; “Further details,” the notice promised, “will be announced in the following issues of the *Pioneer*.” However, besides a brief announcement on February 25 providing ticket sale information (10¢ each), no other references to these plays were made. The February 25 notice also advises that a seating capacity of 150 will be adhered to. This suggests that central staging was once again put to use since 150 was the limit set for the centrally staged first bill of plays in the same venue.

Once again, Dierlam chose unconventional plays for production, that is, unconventional for the resources and audience acculturation available to him at Granada. *A Minuet* (1922) is a three-character piece which suggests that Dierlam had to choose a play based on the availability of actors. This verse play takes place during the French Revolution in “the living room of the Gaoler’s quarters in the prison of Conciergerie.” An extensive set design is offered, but Dierlam’s production may have been influenced by the author’s footnote: “This scenic direction is a counsel of perfection. The play can quite well be performed in any ordinary room without scenery.” As the action unfolds, the Marquis awaits execution by the Gaoler who continually taunts him. Soon, he is visited by the Marchioness, his wife, who announces her intention to be executed along with him. Together, they face the guillotine with bravado and the curtain falls on an intrepid couple:

THE MARQUIS (*Eagerly*). Is there a heaven, Doris?
THE MARCHIONESS (*Recovering, smiles bravely, and holds out her...*)

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hand). Come and see.
(As the Marquis takes her hand and they go out)

THE CURTAIN FALLS

It is important to note that *A Minuet* is not the first camp play to involve either the French Revolution or condemned prisoners who face their execution with extreme bravery. Tule Lake's productions of *The Valiant* and *Beauty and the Jacobin* are cases in point.

Perhaps the Japanese felt a kinship with such characters, particularly since they themselves endured their incarceration with a stoicism not dissimilar to a show of bravery. Or, perhaps Caucasians like Robert Dierlam believed they would. Plays which lauded bravery without incident were surely preferable to the administration to those which encouraged revolt.

Some information is known about the production of *A Minuet*. Lili Sasaki remembers the play vividly:

I can recall only one serious play—a short one—central staged and directed by . . . Mr. Dierlam. The lead player, George Akahoshi. I can't recall the title or just who the author was, only the setting was during the French Revolution!! George A. had to don pink silky pants and [a] frilly blouse. The delinquent boys in camp invaded the front row seats to heckle George, but to their chagrin, George did such a serious, good piece of acting that not any fellow jeered!!

Sasaki's recollection gives a glimpse into the type of costuming available to the Little Theatre and the dedication of George Akahoshi whose acting was powerful enough to silence the "delinquent boys." She also implies by her description that theater was truly a diversion for some spectators; the "delinquent boys" most likely needed something to do for an evening. To what extent their reason for attending the theater is reflective of the camp population as a whole is not known, but in comparison with other camp theaters it
seems as though Granada’s Little Theatre was not able to engender fully the “theater-as-community-builder” of High School theater, nor the “theater-as-acculturation” paradigm of what I have called Barrack theater.

E.P. Conkle’s Sparkin’ (1928) presents language problems similar to A Minuet. While the Conkle play is not in verse, it does attempt to reproduce an Appalachian dialect most likely quite uncommon to Japanese ears:

GRANNY. Git away with yer lollygaggin’ ‘round me, will you? I never cud tolerate no lollygaggin’ round! Lute usta be all th’ time a lollygaggin’ round. He didn’t care who he lollygagged with, neither. (7)

The play involves the clumsy courtship of two young people, Lessie Hanna and Orry Sparks. Orry comes to court Lessie and brings her a sack of chocolates (which Granny quickly claims as her own). The awkward Orry spends most of his time spitting “t’baccer” out a door which turns out to be the closet where Granny’s newly white dress is hanging (although how this was done in the round is not known). The brief play ends as Orry articulates his love for Lessie.

Aside from the problems inherent in the pronunciation of Conkle’s lively dialect, the play poses no insurmountable obstacles in terms of staging. Just how the inept courtship between Orry and Lessie (interrupted continuously by the ornery Granny) appealed to the spectators is not known. Sasaki’s “delinquent boys” would no doubt find the play quite corny (if they stayed for both one-acts and if Sparkin’ was performed after A Minuet). However, the Nisei in general were more publicly demonstrative regarding courtship and love in male/female relationships than the Issei, who, in practice, seemed to favor arranged marriages over lengthy courtships. In their attempt to imitate “the
traditional American reverence for love and romance," the Nisei often romanticized
relationships to the point of foregoing Issei conceptions of “duty and obligation” in
male/female relationships (Kitano 41-42). Therefore, despite their unfamiliarity with the
cultural background of the characters of Sparkin’, Nisei spectators would surely
recognize the appropriateness of two young Japanese Americans in love.

On March 20, the Pioneer announced the next production by the Little Theater:

COMEDY TO BE PRESENTED
Biggest To Date

“Ladies of the Jury,” the biggest stage production in the center to
date will be presented by the senior high school dramatics class March 30-
31 and April 1-2 at Terry Hall.
Admission will be 16 cents per person and the tickets will go on
sale next week.
The play, written by Fred Ballard, scored a hit on Broadway
several years back. The movie version of it was starred in by Edna Mae
Oliver.
Robert Dierlam, dramatics coach and director of the play, reveals
that because of the lack of equipment, the three-act comedy will be given
with central staging.

A number of things are suggested by this notice. First, it is apparent that Dierlam’s “little
theatre” concept was not working and the decision was made to involve the high school
more directly. Thus, with this production camp theater at Granada shifted from Barrack
to High School (or, more accurately, from a hybrid resembling Barrack theater to one
resembling High School theater). Such a shift changed the spirit of Granada’s camp
theater movement considerably and this is reflected in the play chosen for production: a
three-act comedy as opposed to one-acts (which were typical of Barrack theater). Under
the auspices of the high school, Dierlam did not need to worry about finding actors and
could conceivably choose a play before choosing a cast. He also had the luxury of being

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able to stage a play with a large cast (22 appear in *Ladies of the Jury*). The March 8 issue of *It*, the official paper of Amache Senior High, confirms the participation of many students in various backstage committees as well: Properties, Makeup, Stage, Costumes, and even a Prompter.

Second, there is a great deal of attention paid to this production as a theatrical event. The references to Broadway and Hollywood are no doubt meant to increase attendance. This announcement also attempts to justify the increased ticket price via advertising hype (it should be noted that the 16¢ price may be incorrect. Later editions of the *Pioneer* list a 15¢ admission which seems more in line with camp theater prices in general). Finally, despite claims of “the biggest stage production . . . to date,” it is obvious that central staging remained a choice of last resort for Robert Dierlam. Staging is the main obstacle in Ballard’s *Ladies of the Jury* (1929) for the play takes place in two settings: a court house and a jury room. The elaborate set described in the Samuel French edition obviously could not be duplicated at Granada, and Dierlam had no intention of doing so in the round.

The shift from Barrack to High School theater is evident in the subsequent notices regarding *Ladies of the Jury*. On March 27 the *Pioneer* reminded readers that the play was to begin its run. The paper stressed the play’s casting, labeling it an “all-student affair,” which implies that Dierlam cast the play in a manner consistent with other high school productions: as a class requirement. This new emphasis on the participation of students is noteworthy, particularly in light of the fact that only students were acting in plays prior to *Ladies of the Jury*. Now, however, these “students” were representative of
the camp high school—the hub of the Nisei community as defined by the administration—and were no longer simply internees interested in theater. The “review” of the production (April 3)—no more than an announcement that the play ended its four-day run—again highlights the participation of the high school students.

On April 7 the Little Theatre honored its own:

LITTLE THEATER HONORS SEVEN

Seven members of the Little Theater group will be honored with a farewell party tonight at 7pm. They are Tazi Hirano, George Yoshida, Cherry Yoshitomi, Hippo Shibata, Estella Hoshimiya, Tad Murakami, and Mitty Kimura.

Everyone interested in drama and the various fields connected with it, such as stage crew, costuming, and make-up, is invited to attend.

Emigration from the relocation camps was not uncommon, particularly for students planning to attend college and those seeking jobs in major cities; camp newspapers regularly posted employment opportunities for Japanese Americans. Exactly who sponsored this celebration is not known. Planned events of this type were usually the domain of the administration. However, the specific invite to those interested in theater arts implies an occasion initiated by Robert Dierlam as an act of kindness toward his students. Given the fond memories the Sasakis have of Dierlam, it would not be surprising that he might undertake such a farewell party.

The emigration of the theater students seems to have taken its toll on the Little Theater. On April 14 the group announced a meeting “to recruit new members.” The direct participation of the high school is evident in this notice, as it is in subsequent notices. Robert Dierlam, now listed as the Little Theatre’s “advisor,” offered to “demonstrate the art of stage make-up” to the attendees. Similarly, on April 17 Dierlam
offered a class in stage makeup as well as a discussion group of Clifford Odets' *Waiting For Lefty.*

On April 19, *It* announced that

An organization meeting of the dramatics club will be held after school today, Monday, April 19. All those interested in dramatics are urged to attend. You do not have to be enrolled in the dramatics class. The club, after organization, will hold socials, outings, etc. They will also be the sponsoring body of all school plays and a certain number of school assemblies.

They have at present $30.00 in their treasury, which they hope to put into good use for stage equipment for the new school building.

Apparently, theater was still being very much attempted at Granada, but it was no longer as independent of the high school as it once was. The fact that Dierlam's group was now a "club" reveals that theater was more or less an extracurricular activity--one among many; this may not have been acceptable to Dierlam, whose name is curiously absent from this notice. The use of treasury money for future productions and/or the upkeep of the theater itself was as common at the camps as at any high school or community theater group.

No other theater-related activities were publicized in the *Pioneer* after the April announcements. In October the camp ceased all extracurricular activities due to an outbreak of polio. It was not until February of 1944 that theater returned to Granada (at least as far as the newspaper was concerned). When it did return it had undergone a transformation and no longer resembled the enterprising endeavor led by Robert Dierlam.

Notices in the *Pioneer* regarding theater returned on February 16, 1944:

ALL-STAR CAST PLAY SLATED FOR BOOK REVIEW TOMORROW
"Miracle of the Dinube" [sic] by Maxwell Anderson will be conducted in the form of reading rehearsals at tomorrow evening’s book review, 7:30 o’clock, at the high school library according to William A. Easton, librarian.

In the all-star cast of the play are faculty members Donald Drummond, Edmund Eakler, Samuel Gordon, Lowell Jackson, Melvin McGovern, Herbert K. Walther and Miss Grace Lewis.

Two "surprise packages" will be featured with dramatizations by Dr. and Mrs. Enoch Dumas, Miss Mariel Groves, Lowell Jackson, Miss Patricia Sands and others.

Music will be provided by the high school orchestra under the direction of Charles Hinman. The public is cordially invited to attend.

This notice is startling for an obvious reason: it involves Caucasians only. It is not known why this event was undertaken nor can it be inferred what such an event contributes to the sense of community the administration utilized as its motivation for most extracurricular activities. The open invitation to the public at large suggests that this event was not meant solely for high school Nisei. Yet, it seems akin to faculty talent shows held at high schools all over the country. In addition, the Pioneer also announced that the faculty members will present a radio version of the Anderson play at a “student body assembly.” Just what motivated the Caucasian faculty to present this play without the participation of internees (or so it seems) remains a mystery. Clearly, though, theater at Granada had taken an odd turn since the days of Robert Dierlam.

Perhaps in recognition of this, the March 22 issue of the Pioneer published the following notice:

TO REORGANIZE “LITTLE THEATER”

Plans for the reorganization of a “Little Theater,” under the leadership of Esther Takei, will be discussed at a special meeting this evening, 7 o’clock, at the 8F recreation hall, according to Taka Aratani of the community activities.

All interested persons are urged to attend.
Apparently, the need to keep theater in the hands of the Nisei became quite compelling at this time. Aside from the Caucasian takeover in February, the Nisei also encountered theatrical challenges from the Issei. In February, a new Japanese drama was presented at a talent show, with other dramas featured in April and May (although it is unknown if the April play was “new”). On April 14 the group was addressed by Robert Dierlam’s apparent replacement, high school dramatics instructor, Robert George, who was scheduled to “discuss the proposed program of the Little Theatre group.” However, as with most ambitious Nisei-run groups at other camps, Ms. Takei’s organization never materialized to the extent that it was in any way publicized in official camp publications (such as the newspaper).

The next announcement regarding Nisei theater clearly demonstrates that what was once an ambitious group resembling Barrack theater ensembles, was now simply a High School community theater. On April 29 the *Pioneer* published the news of the senior class play, Aurania Rouverol’s *Growing Pains* (1934), to be directed by Robert George. The play was to be performed over two consecutive nights to a limit of 500 persons and with a ticket price of 15¢; students with activity cards were admitted free of charge. The play is typical high school fare involving the trials and tribulations of two adolescents, George and Terry McIntyre, and their well-meaning parents who try to get involved but are usually relegated to the sidelines. The three-act play sports a very large cast of 18 with about 9 extras (most of whom are teenage friends of the McIntyre children); the action takes place on a single set: the patio of the McIntyre home in northern California.
As popular as this play was at the time, it is clearly not the type of play Robert Dierlam would have staged during his tenure at Granada. On a practical level, it seems doubtful that he could have secured that many cast members which leads one to speculate if *Growing Pains* was cast in a manner similar to other high school-based productions: as a mandatory exercise for a grade, a practice Robert Dierlam did not seem to undertake. On an artistic level, the play does not approach the challenging experimental and/or aesthetic qualities found in the plays Dierlam chose for production and may reflect the philosophical and professional gap between Dierlam and his successor. 

It is clear, though, that theater at Granada, when transformed into the purely High School model, became more recognized, more appreciated, and more encouraged by the camp newspaper. On May 6, a glowing “review” of *Growing Pains* appeared:

**JANE UYEMURA “STEALS THE SHOW” IN SENIOR PLAY**

Over 500 people jammed the high school auditorium Thursday night to witness the 3-act comedy, “Growing Pains,” sponsored by the senior class.

Instead of the publicized stars stealing the show, Jane Uyemura, as abnormal Elsie Patterson, drew the big applause of the audience for her splendid performance. Big Tad Ono playing the part of helpless papa McIntyre turned in a commendable piece of acting. Others in the leading roles were Jayne Sato, Gladys Nakagawa, and Jack Yamashiro.

The play was directed by Robert George.

The enthusiasm generated for this production is typical of camp newspapers which supported the activities of the high school. Equally typical is the lack of any specific performance information other than the participation of the students. In addition, it was not uncommon for a renewed emphasis on the high school population to be addressed in the newspapers during the last year of camp life. Although Granada would remain open until October 1945, by mid-1944 the camps were actively depopulating and a positive
spin on camp life—particularly directed toward camp youth—was offered for those remaining.

On July 5, Robert George’s summer session dramatic class announced its intention to produce Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s *The Rivals*. The performances were to take place on July 13 and 14 in the high school auditorium. “A cast of 13,” the *Pioneer* noted, “is at present going through a series of rehearsals.” The July 8 issue offered an even more inviting announcement:

What happens when Captain Absolute and Ensign Beverly fall in love with a beautiful 18-year-old girl, Lydia? What is the result of ensuing romantic trouble when Captain Absolute’s father, Sir Anthony Absolute, takes a hand in the love triangle? Answers to the above questions, as well as other hilarious complications, will be revealed when the summer school dramatic class directed by Robert George presents Richard Brinsley [sic] Sheridan’s brilliant comedy, “The Rivals,” in three acts. The play is scheduled for a nightly performance on Thursday and Friday, July 13 and 14, in the high school auditorium.

Tickets for this stage presentation [sic] will go on sale Monday and may be purchased from any member of the dramatic class for 10 cents. Buy a ducat for an enjoyable evening of laughter and entertainment.

It is obvious that the *Pioneer* supported this theatrical effort without reservation, which was quite a difference from the days of Robert Dierlam where newspaper reportage of plays was meager at best. Knowing that high school-aged Nisei would probably not be inclined to attend the play without some background as to its subject matter, the paper wisely highlighted the romantic and generational conflicts in the script which were sure to register with the Nisei teens.

Perhaps the most comprehensive review ever offered by the *Pioneer* appeared on July 15:
A delightfully romantic comedy, "The Rivals," was given a successful premiere performance Thursday night in the high school auditorium by the summer session dramatic class under Robert George's direction. This play was written by Richard Brinsley Sheridan.

In the opinion of this first-nighter, Jimmy Kamada, cast as a country bumpkin, stole the show with his beguiling glances and creaky voice. Yas Hirano was well cast as dashing Captain Jack Absolute, who got into complications masquerading as Ensign Beverly.

Robert George gave a very capable performance as grouchy, conniving Sir Anthony Absolute, Jack's father, and Allan Asakawa drew many hearty guffaws as lovesick and bewildered Faukland. Sally Muranaga carried off the difficult characterization of befuddled Mrs. Malaprop with finesse.

And the remaining cast, Yoshiko Oda, Lucy Nakano, Setsumi Saito, Joy Takeyama, Min Tonai, Mits Sumada, and George Yonemura turned in passing performance[s].

Robert George's presence in the cast is surprising but understandable given the age of his character and the youth of the actors. This early form of multicultural casting (albeit by necessity rather than to make a sociopolitical point) may have, to some extent, advanced the cause of assimilation as the stage provided a context for a portrayal of the American melting pot.

As if to further demonstrate the celebration of American values at Granada, an "Education week" was declared featuring a play by students at the elementary school. *Young Americans Salute the Flag*, presented in the high school auditorium and directed by Caucasian teachers, "explained briefly the various helpful and patriotic activities of the boys and girls of the elementary school" (*Pioneer*, Nov. 8, 1944). Little is known of this play; it may have been a compilation of scenes created at Granada, or perhaps an established text modified for the camp. According to the *Pioneer* the play featured music, flowers, and an Uncle Sam costume made by Mrs. Hisaye Arakawa.
Young Americans Salute the Flag fits neatly into the policy of assimilation undertaken by camp administrators, particularly in terms of education. Given the existence of the relocation camps it is difficult to avoid being cynical about the whole enterprise. It is one thing to celebrate America and American values; it is quite another to hold such a celebration in an internment camp and to suggest by such a display that young American citizens are not yet truly a part of the culture being celebrated. In general, though, that Japanese attitudes toward assimilation would most likely not look upon such efforts as cynical, but rather as a necessary step toward full immersion into the cultural mainstream.

The Amache High School senior class selected its play and announced its decision in the April 11 issue of the Pioneer. Glenn Hughes’ Spring Fever, a three-act farce, was selected for a two-night run at 7:45 p.m. The team of Mr. and Mrs. O. Anderson directed the play which involves a boarding house run by Mrs. Spangler; the action takes place just prior to commencement at Brookfield College. As was typical of camp High School plays, the focus was not only on youth, but specifically on those preparing for a college career. Plays such as Spring Fever may have been seen as useful for preparing Nisei students for college life (albeit the lighter side of college life), with the added attraction of presenting the life of a collegiate American in a relatively uncomplicated way.

Although Granada remained open until October 1945, no other theater-related announcements appeared in the Pioneer. One reason may be that the population—the smallest of all the camps—was rapidly decreasing due to outside employment, schooling,
or enlistment in the armed forces. There may simply have been no pool of talent suitable for staging plays, nor enough of an audience to warrant their performance. It is at such times that one of the basic differences between Barrack theater and High School theater—in terms of audience—may be seen: without sizable audiences, High School theater had little reason to exist; Barrack theater did not tend to consider audience numbers as a factor in its existence.

While many left Granada by November 1944, one person returned: Robert Dierlam. As the Pioneer related on November 3, Robert Dierlam, former member of the senior high school faculty, visited the center last week. He is teaching in the English-dramatic department at University of Colorado at present.

The announcement hardly pays enough attention to what Dierlam meant to his students, and perhaps more profoundly, to theater at Granada. With the exception of the Tule Lake Nisei, Robert Dierlam was the force behind the most exciting theater produced at any relocation camp and the only Caucasian appearing to attempt to reconcile the primary functions of camp theater: entertainment, art, and acculturation. However, he appeared to wage a one-man battle at Granada, facing obstacles both of and not of his own making. His apparent difficulty in finding talent forced Dierlam to choose some plays based on the number of participants available to him. However, he often chose texts with "built in" problems (difficult staging or dialects, for example). It is my estimation, given the little I know of his activities at Granada, that Robert Dierlam refused to compromise his position on the aesthetic value of theater and preferred to work with a handful of students with a genuine interest in theater, than a class full of people looking for an activity to
pass the time. In this regard, he seems not to have embraced the general WRA policy on education and high school theater, or at least emended that policy to allow his personal preferences to be a factor in his decisions about theater at Granada.
NOTES

1. Robert Dierlam retired from Queens College, CUNY, where he was a professor in the Theater Department. I knew him as an undergraduate; he supervised a student directing project wherein I was an actor. I had no idea that he had any connection to the internment camps. I tracked him down with the gracious help of his daughter, Katy, and interviewed him on Thanksgiving Day, 1994. Unfortunately, poor health and the passage of time has made his memory less than pristine, yet he recalled enough basic information to prove a valuable source for this project.

2. It is my general practice to use the spelling “theater” rather than “theatre.” However, if a camp used the latter spelling when writing about its troupe, I use that form when referring to the “Little Theatre.” Granada seems to have used both spelling interchangeably, I have opted to use “theatre” when discussing the Amache Little Theatre.

3. Generally, the Issei used outdoor facilities as performance space for traditional Japanese dramas. If Sasaki means that the indoor stage was used for Issei theatrical productions, than this would be a rare occurrence indeed.

4. I am, of course, speculating that an amateurish production would result from poor resources and inexperienced actors. The strength of each production at Granada may also be traced to the skills of Robert Dierlam as director and his ability to affect individual performance. At present, I have no information which would indicate the relative merits of a particular production. I am merely noting that given the resources and acting experience at Granada (and other camps), the possibility of a less-than polished production is very real.

5. It is tempting to consider the consequences had *Lefty* ever been staged at the camps. The agit-prop play would have surely been a cause for alarm for the paranoid administration. However, such controversial fare would most likely not have been considered for production—particularly by the Nisei themselves who, as far as can be observed, did not use theater to anger, alienate, or in any way incite crowds.

6. Ironically, had Dierlam staged a play like *Growing Pains* he would have most likely reached a wider, more appreciative audience, and would have made greater strides
toward assimilation. However, his artistic integrity may have been compromised to a point he would not be willing to accept.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Also known as the Central Utah Relocation Center, Topaz was located 140 miles southwest of Salt Lake City, Millard County, Utah. Opened on September 11, 1942, Topaz' population was made up entirely of Californians; the population peaked at approximately 8,100 in March 1943. As at Tule Lake, flower shell designs were a chief artistic endeavor for the Topaz evacuees. However, Topaz distinguishes itself for its library. Each camp had a library (in terms of theater, the camp library was often the source for plays), but the Topaz library possessed the largest collection of native Japanese literature at any of the camps. Such a stronghold of Issei culture must be considered when determining the extent of that generation's influence at the camp.

Topaz' camp newspaper was the Topaz Times, and its first issue was published just six days after the arrival of the first evacuees. As for theater, it was not until December 5, 1942 that a notice of evening "Dramatics" classes was posted in the paper. This offering was under the auspices of the Office of Adult Education and Mr. George L. Lewis, the high school speech instructor, was to teach the courses. From this early notice we can see that theater at Topaz was to be under direct control of the
administration, most likely as part and parcel of its desire to make the camps a center for assimilation and acculturation. With such a mindset, theater would of necessity fit within the High School paradigm; indeed, this was the case at Topaz. Along with the high school productions, Christmas shows were also popular. On December 12, for instance, the play *The Other Wise Man* was announced in the *Times*.

On December 28, under the heading "News Briefs," the following announcement appeared:

DRAMA: "D298" a one-act comedy will be presented to the general public on Dec. 29 from 8 PM at DH [Dining Hall] 1. Already acclaimed as [sic] success by the high-school audience last Wednesday afternoon, the hilarious play is enacted by high-school thespians.

As the notice indicates, this play was previously performed, but no evidence of the prior production exists. I have not yet discovered who sponsored this show--the administration or the Nisei themselves. The high school production itself seems to have been a trial run of sorts. Generally, High School theater—even in an internment camp—was meant to pull in large audiences. Because of this goal, large-cast plays of three acts are most commonly produced. The one-act *D298* seems to be more the efforts of an extracurricular club than a formal presentation of the Senior Class variety.

On January 14, 1943 an unusual production took place at the Topaz City High School. At the third student assembly of the school year, an all-male faculty presentation, *The Ride of Dan McGrum*, was offered. All-faculty productions were rare at the high schools since theater was meant as an opportunity for learning and a means of acculturation. It can only be assumed that such a presentation was meant
primarily for entertainment purposes. I have not determined if this presentation was a staged reading or a memorized performance, nor if there were any speaking parts other than the narrator (played by speech teacher George Lewis). What is known is that this student assembly also featured Nisei performers including tap dancing and piano solos.

February 19 featured an all-student evening of one-acts presented by George Lewis whose speech and dramatics classes offered *Youth Adds a Dash of Pepper*, *Lo, the Gaunt Wolf*, and *Little Darling*. On March 6 the *Times* revealed that two of these plays--*Youth Adds a Dash of Pepper* and *Little Darling*--were presented at the two camp communities, Delta and Hinckley. Unfortunately, the venue for these productions, including the ones at the high school, has not yet been ascertained. It is not clear that the Topaz City High School had an auditorium to use for the three one-acts. Plays prior to and after the one-act play productions were presented in one of the camp dining halls, which most likely means that a stage (that is, a raised platform) was not available. According to the *Times*, a "capacity crowd invited by members of the cast" witnessed George Lewis' one-act play festival. Lewis also performed a reading of Margaret Larkin's religious one-act, *El Cristo*, announced March 13 in the *Times*.

*Our Town*

The first production typical of High School theater was first announced in the *Times* on April 15:
"OUR TOWN" TO BE PRESENTED BY TOPAZ HI

Now in their sixth week of rehearsal, the Topaz high school drama department is preparing for its production of "Our Town," the Broadway success play by Thornton Wilder, in two series of performances during the next two weeks, according to George L. Lewis, director. With each series presenting a different cast of performers, the initial series will be held April 21, 22 and 23 from 8:30 PM at Dining Hall 32.

An interesting feature of the production will be the lack of scenery or props. Instead, the play will achieve its effects through the acting and lighting alone, it was pointed out.

Invitations for the first production will be issued at the high school beginning Monday. The audience for each performance will be limited to 400.

Wilder's play fits the High School theater bill perfectly: a large-cast play of three acts.

In addition, the play's message of the sanctity of the simple, all-American life would surely have earned the enthusiastic approval of the administration who, in theory, attempted to present camp life as both simple and (in particular) all-American.

However, some controversy surrounds this production, leaving open many important questions concerning its relationship to the administration. Michi Kobi, who played the role of Emily Webb in the second series (April 28, 29, and 30), offered the following observation:

My knowledge of theater within Topaz... was limited to the high school I attended. Despite its rudimentary curriculum, there were individual teachers who were resourceful in their efforts to provide an American education in the incongruous concentration camp. Among them was George Lewis, English teacher, who dared to defy Administration and Japanese inhibitions as well, by starting a drama group. The first play he produced and directed was Thornton Wilder's "Our Town." I was cast as Emily. It was entertainment that was appreciated by the culturally starved internees. (October 20, 1994)

It is difficult to assess the total accuracy of Kobi's statement. As my review of the Times reveals, she is incorrect as to the first play Lewis produced and directed at
Topaz. It is clear that the need to demonstrate "American-ness," despite the absurdity of having to do so for citizens, was not lost on her, nor was the fact that the internees needed "culture," in the sense of art, at Topaz. However, it must be remembered that artforms such as theater generally were not of interest to high school-aged Nisei prior to their internment; that the evacuees were "culturally starved," not surprisingly, is the observation of a person who today practices theater as a vocation. No doubt the entertainment value of the play was appreciated, but it seems unlikely that most Nisei looked upon the production of Our Town as a remedy for an unacculturated life.

Perhaps the most telling portion of Kobi's remarks is her suggestion that Lewis defied the administration by presenting plays. When asked for more information, Kobi responded somewhat apologetically:

Please accept my apologies for my extremely poor semantics. It was not appropriate to claim that an English teacher at Topaz H.S. "Dared to defy the Administration" by starting a drama group. It would be daring to defy martinet administration policies that were at best paternalistic with a silent understanding that any act perceived as rebellious would be dealt with harshly.

I may have described Mr. Lewis as defiant because among staffers compliant to regulations, he seemed singly determined to lift us young Japanese Americans from our lowered self-esteem by involving us through the healing power of theater. (November 5, 1994)

Kobi's revision both clarifies and confuses her previous position. There is no evidence which supports the assertion that starting a drama group at Topaz would be in defiance of the Caucasian administration, although Kobi suggests that the administration, by and large, was somewhat paranoid and on constant alert for rebellion, subtle or overt. Still, Kobi implies that Lewis was not "compliant to
regulations" by utilizing theater to heal, suggesting that the administration preferred theater to be for entertainment purposes only. If this is the case, Lewis is one of a handful of Caucasian teachers at all the camps who viewed theater as much more than entertainment.

According to Eleanor Gerard Sekerak, senior high school social studies teacher at Topaz, the administration would most likely not have objected to Lewis' formation of a drama club if it were kept within the confines of the high school. In response to Michi Kobi, Ms. Sekerak writes,

My recollection is that "Our Town" was done by the high school students but I could be wrong and it could have [been] done through adult education. Our first superintendent of schools was a dear person (Dr. John Carlisle) . . . was liberal-minded and compassionate and I can't imagine his having any objection to "Our Town." Our first principal . . . took his professional cues from Dr. Carlisle and would not have objected. The associate project director who supervised education, medical services, welfare, etc. was Lorne Bell, former YMCA executive. I knew him well and he would not have objected nor would the project director, Charles Ernst, a social worker and settlement house director from Boston.

But if George Lewis did "Our Town" as an adult education project I can see why there might have been a problem. In charge of adult education was a Dr. LaVerne Bane [?], Utah native, who was a stickler for going through channels, insisted that everything should be approved by him, had had no experience with either Californians or Japanese-Americans and was a difficult person to work with.

Apparently, administrative resistance to theater--at Topaz at least--was somewhat capricious, depending on the temperament and policies of the individual in charge of a particular arm of the administration. However, the fact that Our Town (and every other Lewis production) was a high school production does not negate the fact that the administration had the final say, even on matters of art; the fact that officials involved
with the school system would not object to theater does not necessarily mean that their approval was not sought.

Even the most compassionate, well-meaning official had the power to decide what art was appropriate for the Nisei to experience. Ironically, in this regard the Issei had greater freedom of expression than the Nisei. They did not seek approval to create beauty at the camp, nor were their theatrical productions—as far as is known—under administration control. The fact is that the Issei were not of great concern to the administration for a number of reasons, the most prominent of which were their age (so they did not pose much of a physical threat), their numbers (Nisei greatly outnumbered Issei at every camp), and their perceived inability to assimilate into the American mainstream. Nisei teenagers were still impressionable enough to mold.

Some information is known of this production of Our Town. According to Kiyochi Kumekawa, the play was chosen because it “required minimum settings. If I remember correctly, all we needed were chairs, a ‘soda fountain’ counter and an outdoor swing chair for two. Elaborate costumes were not required.” Michi Kobi concurs, but suggests that George Lewis used the play as a teaching device, as well as for its practicality:

I believe Mr. Lewis merely exercised ingenuity with an education program that lacked books, study materials and proper facilities. Thus he chose to do a play with his English class. I recall his saying that he chose “Our Town” as sets were minimal and costumes were a minor consideration. (November 5, 1994)

Given the consideration of costumes and sets, Our Town was certainly a prudent choice for production at Topaz. This is particularly the case since it appears as
though the camp did not at this point have a permanent (or, semi-permanent) structure for plays, such as an auditorium. However, Kumekawa believes that the production “inaugurated the just-completed high school hall,” although by “hall” she may simply mean the dining hall mentioned as the play’s venue in the *Times* notice of April 15. It is interesting to note that the *Times* notice devotes a paragraph to the lack of scenery and props, as if this were an innovation in Topaz’ production of the play.

The playbill for the production provides more insights into the decisions—both artistic and practical—made by Lewis. A perusal of the cast list reveals more women than men, as well as women playing traditional male roles. Kiyochi Kumekawa, for instance, portrayed the Stage Manager in both series. She explains, “[t]here were more female participants than males; therefore, the girls took turns participating. To elucidate: boys were ‘on’ at each performance but the girls took turns at every other performance.” Under the heading “Setting,” the play’s three acts are briefly described. Apparently, some license was taken with the timeframe suggested in Wilder’s script. The Topaz production lists 1914 as the year Act One takes place. According to the Stage Manager in the Samuel French acting edition of *Our Town*—the edition Lewis had (Samuel French is thanked in the playbill)—“The date is May 7, 1901, just before dawn” (2). Similarly, Act Two at Topaz takes place in 1917; the French version has 1904 (actually, the play calls for Act Two to take place three years after Act One, so Lewis was at least correct to set his act in 1917). Finally, Topaz’ third act takes place in 1940 while the French script calls for 1913 as the year. Here Lewis projects his act 23 years; the French edition involves only a nine year difference.
Although Lewis certainly had the right to modify the temporal concerns of the play, particularly since it is not dependent on being set in specific years, one may rightfully question Lewis' decision to make such changes. Given the relative young age of the participants and their audience, 1914 would be as remote a year as 1901, so recognition of a shared time of life could not be a factor. Despite this, Lewis may have been trying to move the action of the play to a time more contemporary with his cast, crew, and spectators. This may explain the final act taking place in 1940, although the Nisei would still have been somewhat younger than the main characters, Emily and George, who are approximately 28 in Act Three. Whatever the reason, Lewis resisted the temptation to make Our Town a period piece, yet retained the play's reliance on the passage of time as a motif.

A glimpse into Lewis' vision of the production may be gleaned from his Director's statement, printed in the playbill:

As adults we often forget that our joy in youth came from the use of our imagination. We didn't have an Engine to play train, or a building to house [sic?]. This play is designed to let you, the audience, build the house you want around the characters of the play. The second purpose of the play is to tell in the simplest way we know that happiness cannot be found in reliving the past, but only in living today, tomorrow and tomorrow.

The first part of Lewis' statement may be his justification for tinkering with the time scheme of the script: he built his own house around the characters of the play. His "second purpose" resonates with subtle messages for the interned Nisei. Reliving the past would mean for them reliving the difficulties of being treated as aliens despite citizenship. And although "living today" involves an acceptance of internment camp
life, Lewis' emphasis on living for "tomorrow and tomorrow" suggests the hope of a better life. Such a theme would no doubt be appreciated by the administration which saw itself as the vanguard of a better life for the Nisei through assimilation and acculturation and suggests that the well-meaning Lewis was inextricably linked in philosophy to the WRA--the organization which hired him.

As was typical of high school productions, numerous committees were formed to work on the play. For the production of Our Town, a Costume Committee of three, a Publicity and Usher Committee of 10, and a Make-Up Committee of 11, along with Directors of Lighting, Music, Stage and Scenery, and Props kept plenty of students busy, participating in both the theater arts and in the hierarchical organization of American life (as defined by the administration). Some performers with minor roles (townspeople, for example) served on the committees as well. The playbill also gives some indication of planned productions for the future. Listed on the playbill as "Coming Attractions" are Little Women (3-acts), Utter Relaxation (one-act), Right About Face (one-act), Fun After Supper (one-act), and Bayou Harliquinade (one-act). The number of one-act plays is uncommon for camp high schools, but more than one play may have been scheduled for performance on a given night. However, none of these plays were ever known to be produced at Topaz.

Notices and "reviews" of the first Our Town series provide some information as to the size of the audiences attending the play. On April 22 the Times labeled the production "a tremendous success," noting that "approximately 300 witnessed the presentation." On April 27 it was reported that more than 900 people attended the
first series, with "a similar number . . . expected to witness the coming presentations," making Topaz' *Our Town* the best attended of all camp theater productions. Given that there was no change of venue between the first and second series, and the fact that changes in casting did not involve every member of the cast, it is apparent that the play was extremely popular. The play's popularity may be a factor, as may the typically American idealistic landscape that the assimilation-hungry Japanese may have found appealing. The use of the word "Japanese" is purposeful here, for the Issei were also involved in this production. George Lewis seems to have secured their participation since he thanks the "Parents of the Cast" for their "Moral support and cooperation" in the playbill.

We have seen that *Our Town* was a wise choice for an internment camp high school production because of its minimal set, prop, and costume requirements. Also, the play's large cast allowed many more participants than the average play. However, the play resonates thematically with its "all-American" outlook, making it additionally a good choice to demonstrate to the Japanese the way life in America--albeit idealized--should be and could be. Through an all-Nisei cast, Lewis was most likely able to demonstrate to his audience that Wilder's message may transcend ethnicity. As Lewis' statement in the playbill suggests, Wilder allows room for interpretation; Grover's Corners, New Hampshire may as well be South Bend, Indiana, Nowata, Oklahoma, or even Topaz City, Utah. As with most theatrical productions in the internment camps, the Japanese were given a rare opportunity to see themselves depicted as something other than sneaky villains or servants. With *Our Town* they
were average Americans, exactly the position most longed to obtain. Of course, it is
not known just how deeply, if at all, this interpretation registered with the Nisei.
Michi Kobi admits, "[a]t the time, I was too immature to appreciate Thornton's larger,
humane philosophy."

The June 5 issue of the Times revealed plans to present two one-act plays by
the "Girl's Association," a high school organization. Dining Hall 32 was to be the
venue for the two unnamed plays and tickets were 10¢ at the door or 5¢ for those with
student body cards. Profits from the production were to be "contributed to the
community-wide Topaz Student Aid Scholarship Fund." It is unknown if the plays
were produced as no further notice about them ever appeared in print.

On July 24, a new call for participants appeared:

Registration of young people interested in the dramatic arts will
be held Monday night from 7:30 o'clock at 32-8-EF, according to the
adult education office.
The dramatics group will be directed by George L. Lewis, high
school drama instructor.

Although typical of similar invitations at other camps, this notice becomes somewhat
problematized by the issues raised earlier by Eleanor Gerard Sekerak regarding Topaz'
adult education manager, Dr. Bane. Was Dr. Bane's permission sought by George
Lewis? Why was the adult education department involved at all if "young people"
(presumably meaning high school students) were being solicited? Was theater no
longer a part of high school extracurricular activities? This possibility does not seem
to be the case since future productions were under the auspices of the high school.

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Perhaps the fact that the school year was over had something to do with what branch of camp government was in charge of activities such as theater.

On August 24, four one-act plays were planned by the "high school summer English class as a culmination of its activities." Once again, the names of the proposed plays were not published in this announcement, although they are in a subsequent notice on August 26. In that notice, only three plays are said to be scheduled:

With 20 students participating, members of the junior high school English classes will present 3 one-act plays tomorrow night at dining hall 32 from 8 o'clock, it was announced by Mrs. Ellen Henderson, director.

The 3 plays are "The Little Cousin," "All in a Mistake," and "Petty Patch's Strike."

It is not known why George Lewis was not the director for these plays. Also, it is unclear if the participants were juniors in high school or students in the camp junior high.

The final production of 1943 was, as might be expected, a Christmas program featuring an original play entitled *Out of the Mist*. Written and directed by Riuzo Aoki, the play was labeled a "high school fellowship play"; lighting was to be handled by the high school drama group for this production. No other information is available about this play, its venue, or its participants.

High school productions continued to dominate theater at Topaz during 1944. On January 14 the *Times* announced a production of *The Carter Family*. High school students attended a matinee while the general public attended the play's evening performance. No other information is known about this production. Slightly more is
known of the production of *What A Life*, “a Henry Aldritch [sic] comedy” produced in April and directed by Mr. B.D. Evans, “drama department head.” Apparently, George Lewis had left the camp by this time. The *Times* reported that ticket prices were 10¢ for the general public and 5¢ for those with student body cards, standard for Topaz High School productions.

Nineteen forty-four also produced some non-standard theatrical productions. *Nine Girls*, a three-act mystery drama with an all-female cast was presented by the Delta High School in late April. No admission charge was levied for this production which took place, according to the *Times*, “in the auditorium.” It is unclear what is meant by “auditorium” since Topaz productions regularly were staged in dining halls. It is, of course, entirely possible that a dining hall served as an all-purpose auditorium. On May 11 and 12 a Gay Nineties Review was presented. Produced by the high school drama and music departments, the review featured a “Flora Dora sextet, skits and musicals,” as well as “Gay Nineties costumes” (*Times*, May 3, 1944).

In November, *Land O’ Cotton*, a minstrel show was presented by the Delta Lion’s Club. While minstrel shows were not uncommon at the camps, *Land O’ Cotton* seems more elaborate than most. Ticket prices were somewhat higher than at other theatrical presentations--15¢ for Topaz residents and 30¢ for “appointed staff members” (*Times*, Nov. 18, 1944)—and refreshments were offered for sale. Curiously, this minstrel show was sponsored by the high school yearbook staff. Why the high school would sponsor a minstrel show is not clear, although it is plausible that revenues were
expected to be high and the yearbook would therefore stand to increase the amount in its treasury greatly.

Another source reveals additional information regarding theater at Poston. The high school yearbook of 1944, Ramblings, devotes a page to the Theta Alpha Phi club which "presented several dramatic hits." Among these "hits," only the productions of What A Life and The Carter Family were publicized in the Times. The other productions include The Vane Effort, Red Flannels, and The Last Curtain, all one-act plays. The former two plays were produced in November 1943; the latter play, "commemorating Abraham Lincoln's birthday," must have been presented in February 1944. Along with a photograph of the entire club, the cast of The Vane Effort is shown on the page in what appears to be a posed tableau. The photograph shows the cast before a large curtain and seated on chairs, but no other production variables may be assessed from this one snapshot.

The description of Theta Alpha Phi discloses that it was formed for the purpose of presenting theater to the Topaz populace:

Formed for the purpose of furthering interest in the field of drama, and to provide entertainment for the students, the Theta Alpha Phi is one of the vital groups contributing pleasure and zest to the student body. For his skill in drawing out the best dramatic possibilities of his pupils, B.D. Evans, speech and drama director, is given much of the credit for the Thespians' successful year. In presenting these student plays outside, Mr. Evans and his Thespian group are making a positive contribution in promoting goodwill relations.

There are a number of questions raised by this description. For example, what is meant by "outside"? By "outside," it is assumed that a wider audience than the high school students is meant, but does this refer to non-high school-aged Nisei, Issei, and/
or members of the administration? Who exactly is to be on the receiving end of the "goodwill relations" mentioned above. Were such overtures of goodwill made to the administration and if so, why? Is this reference an indication of strife within the Nisei community? Or must goodwill be fostered between Nisei and Issei? In any case, this description suggests that theater might be used to bridge gaps, although the nature of these gaps remains unknown to me at present. With few exceptions, the problem of unanswered questions remains foremost in this study. Only time and the ability to conduct more research may lead to answers.

The legacy of theater at Topaz—at this point in my research—rests on George Lewis' production of *Our Town*. More so than perhaps any other play produced behind barbed wire, *Our Town* may be seen as the uniquely "American" play; it remains standard high school fare even to this day. However, I believe it deserves some renewed consideration as a text given that the production took place in an internment camp for citizens, ironically, a uniquely American venue. While High School theater always stressed community-building, it was usually the act of producing theater which supposedly provided community experience; the choice of text was usually not a factor at the high schools. In this case, though, text seems all-important. While some idea of George Lewis' conception of his production of *Our Town* is known, it would, of course, be more useful to know what in Wilder's text was stressed in performance (and how) and whether any concerns other than the practical theater concerns (size of cast, lack of set, etc.) dictated Lewis' choice of this play. Perhaps in time, more will be known about this seemingly ironic choice.


CHAPTER 7

TULE LAKE

Introduction

In most aspects of relocation camp life, the Tule Lake Relocation Center stands out as an anomaly. Theater was no exception for it was quite unlike theater at any of the other nine camps. Although the Tule Lake Tri-State High School (so named because the internees arrived primarily from three states: California, Washington, and Oregon) was as active in extracurricular activities as any other camp high school, no theater club ever formed under the auspices of the school. Barrack theater, however, was uncommonly successful, prolific, and widely supported by the camp newspaper, the Tulean Dispatch.

The unique history of Tule Lake bears repeating, especially since I believe that conditions there defined and in some ways created the particular type of theater that was produced. Located at the northeastern tip of California in the town of Newell, 35 miles southeast of Klamath Falls, Oregon, Tule Lake opened on May 26, 1942. Its 7,400 acres set aside as a residence area could hold a capacity of 16,000 persons, a figure worth comparing with other camps: Poston held 18,000 on 71,000 acres; Heart Mountain 16,000 on 46,000 acres. Tule Lake held more people on less land than any of the camps and by December 1944 exceeded its stated capacity by nearly 3,000 inhabitants. The camp was made up of 64 blocks (comprised of 14 barracks each) of living quarters in
seven wards. Located in a dried lake bed, sea shells were in abundance and the chief (but by no means the only) artform was shell flower creations.

Tension became characteristic at every camp, but more so at Tule Lake. Obviously, the more people in close confinement the greater the risk of altercation. Dorothy S. Thomas and Richard Nishimoto explain, “[a]s the projects became filled . . . intergroup antagonisms flared up and faith in the good intentions of the administration declined” (40). Intergroup antagonisms took many forms at Tule Lake: Issei versus Nisei, Issei versus Kibei, Nisei versus Kibei, and, in particular, Caucasians versus Japanese and “loyal” Nisei versus “disloyal” Nisei. It is these particular antagonisms that made the Tule Lake Little Theatre what it was.

Tensions between generational groups were typical in all camps; indeed, they were a matter of course for years before the internments. The Issei, aliens in a land they called home, saw in the Nisei the hope that a person of Japanese ancestry might finally gain acceptance in America. To the Issei, their Nisei children were a bridge between the culture of Japan and the promise of America. As Issei Daisuke Kitagawa explains, though,

The predicament of the Nisei was this: He was destined not to honor his father and mother. How could he, when they were so utterly dependent on him? How could he respect them, when they themselves were convinced that he was far superior to them? I saw love and affection abundantly shown by the Nisei toward his parents, but seldom respect. It could not have been otherwise, when the Issei, despite all his native ability and intelligence, his education and training, his cultural attainment and technical skill, was a helpless and unacceptable foreigner insofar as American society was concerned. (24-25)
The evacuation notices which effectively equated Issei and Nisei as enemies of the United States only added to an already existing animosity (a one-sided one, given Kitagawa's description). Once camps were established, Issei and Nisei sparred over their limited role in camp government with Issei controlling block meetings and Nisei dominating community council affairs. The separate communities of camp life were also apparent in the camp newspapers which usually had a separate Japanese language section for Issei. In terms of theater, the Issei used separate venues and were generally more successful (in terms of the number of actual performances, certainly not economically) than their Nisei counterparts.

The greatest cultural tension at Tule Lake had to be between Nisei themselves and this relates directly to the registration issue of 1943. By January of that year news reached the camps that a registration system was proposed for residents. The Army initially wanted to create an all-Nisei volunteer combat unit and to that end planned to register "loyal" males of draft age. However, it was soon decided to register all internees--Issei and Nisei, male and female--as a means to determine loyalty for what would eventually become a policy of segregation. Many camps complied with the process, but Tule Lake resisted, often violently, and with lasting effects. An army team arrived at Tule Lake on February 9 with the intention of administering the registration process. This process involved the completion of a questionnaire--entitled "Application for Leave Clearance"--which included the following two questions, now known as the "loyalty questions":

27. Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, where ordered?
28. Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States and faithfully defend the United States and foreswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, to any other foreign government, power or organization?

These questions inflamed an already outraged populace. To ask those well beyond combat years to serve in the armed forces was foolish enough, but to ask those not eligible for citizenship—and those whose citizenship meant nothing—to defend the United States was downright insulting. In addition, to ask American citizens to “foreswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor” suggested an fidelity which was simply not there. Although Question 28 was rewritten for the Issei, asking instead if they will “swear to abide by the laws of the United States and to take no actions which would in any way interfere in the war effort of the United States,” the indignation caused by the registration process left many more Japanese bitter and resentful.

Many answered “Yes” to both questions, thinking it the right thing to do to reflect their true loyalty to America. Of these, young men of military age were asked to register for the armed forces. Others were frustrated by their inability to qualify their answers (a simple “Yes” or “No” could not clarify their position) and wound up answering “Yes-No” or “No-Yes.” Still others answered “No-No” due to their outrage at having to demonstrate loyalty via a questionnaire or out of fear of a hostile interior into which they would be placed as the segregation of “loyals” and “disloyals” began. Some evacuees refused to answer altogether. In all, approximately 16% of the total evacuee population of all camps either refused to register or answered “No” to Question 28. However, 42% of Tule Lake inhabitants were in this category which stigmatized the camp as “disloyal.”
In February 1943, petitions against registration and demands for the right of expatriation in lieu of registration increased at Tule Lake. The infamous “Block 42 Incident” involved 34 youths sent to jail by the Military Police because of their insistence on being able to apply for expatriation. The WRA meanwhile began to arrest those they considered to be “pro-Japanese agitators.” This climate of extreme tension peppered by violence made Tule Lake a dangerous camp indeed. In July, Tule Lake was selected as the camp which would house the “disloyals” (that is, those who qualified their answers or responded “No-No” to Questions 27 and 28) and the decision was made to remove all “loyals” from the camp to be replaced by dissidents from the other nine camps. This process began on September 13, 1943 with the removal of “loyals” from Tule Lake (approximately 6,250) to the armed forces or other camps; on September 18, the “disloyals” arrived.

The Tule Lake Relocation Center was now renamed the Tule Lake Segregation Center. The camp’s new status required a number of physical changes including the addition of an eight-foot high double “manproof” fence, the construction of a new gate between the colony and the administration area, an increase in the number of MPs, and a formation of tanks in full view of the residents (Spoilage 106). Despite these changes tensions continued, and martial law was declared on November 13 and lasted until January 15, 1944. By December 1944, far later than any of the other camps, Tule Lake reached its peak population of nearly 18,800 inhabitants, causing tension and strife to continue until the camp closed in March 1946—some four months after the closing of every other camp except for Jerome (which had closed in June 1944).
The Little Theatre

Talent and variety shows were first announced in the *Tulean Dispatch* in June and July of 1942, barely a month after the first evacuee arrived. On July 28 a notice entitled “Registration for Drama” appeared:

> A dramatics class is being planned on with registration starting today at #1908. Not only will there be acting to do, but those interested in stage setting, voice & diction, lighting, costuming, make-up or others on that line are asked to sign up with Perry Saito.

As with other similar announcements, a registration process was instituted paralleling the bureaucratic workings of camp life, under the auspices of the camp Recreation Department. The fact that playwrights were not recruited in this announcement (unlike at Poston) implies that no original plays were planned by this nascent group.

Perry Saito is a figure of some importance regarding camp theater. Now deceased, Mr. Saito remained at Tule Lake only until May 1943. However, in that short time he transformed the Tule Lake Little Theatre into the most prolific theater group known at any of the camps. Theater apparently was in his blood, but never became his vocation. After release from Tule Lake Saito graduated from Illinois Wesleyan University in 1946 and then went on to Garrett Theological Seminary (of Northwestern University) where he graduated in 1949. After a couple of years of disappointments in search of a position as a minister, Saito became the head minister at one of Wisconsin’s largest churches in 1951, also serving as a district superintendent overseeing 60 churches. Cancer claimed Perry Saito at age 63, just as he was in line to become a bishop.
What is not known about Mr. Saito is the extent of his involvement with the WRA. Evidently he was a member of the camp Recreation Department, but this does not necessarily translate as being a champion of WRA policy. It appears as though WRA control over theater at Tule Lake was not as stringent as at Poston where plays were more or less commissioned for production by the administration. Regarding administrative control over theater at Tule Lake, Perry Saito’s younger brother, Morse, remarks,

Under our first project director Elmer [Shirrell] he often visited and supported the activities of the recreation department. Of course the WRA (War Relocation Authority) wanted to check whether we were doing anything to sabotage the war effort, etc. . . . The next director [, Harvey Coverley,] was a real son of a bitch out to challenge the “enemy” including U.S. citizens. He suspected everybody including the strongest pro-Americans in Tule. (April 4, 1995)

Elmer Shirrell, described by Thomas and Nishimoto as “a man of great energy and good will” (38), was replaced by Harvey Coverley in December 1942. This marked a significant change not only for camp operations but for the Little Theatre as well because Shirrell was gone just as the group presented its first bill of plays. Thus, the Tule Lake Little Theatre operated almost exclusively under Director Coverley who, if Morse Saito’s memory is to be trusted, was not a supporter of Nisei theater (or anything Japanese, for that matter). Any support enjoyed under the tenure of Shirrell was lost on Coverley and it is not unreasonable to suspect that the Little Theatre operated cautiously under the new regime.

Throughout August 1942 the newly-formed theater group posted notices of meetings in the Dispatch. On August 6 the Dispatch editorial page, “We the People”
featured a complaint about the lack of applause at talent shows. When asked about this, actor Hiroshi Kashiwagi was quick to distinguish the theater group from the talent shows:

Talent shows were outdoors and that may be why people didn't applaud. It was sort of open. You could chat among yourselves. But I didn't have that experience [at the theater group productions]. I think they all applauded.

Kashiwagi points to the rather impromptu quality of camp talent shows as well as the necessity for more intimate indoor performances in order to achieve better audience responsiveness. On August 13 the drama group announced the formation of a more well-defined organization:

DRAMA CLUB ORGANIZED
A meeting was held Sunday to organize a dramatics club for all persons interested in acting, directing, voice and diction, costume designing, stage setting, make-up, lighting or other fields of the drama.

The 40 members present decided upon a little theatre type of organization. The four-fold purposes being: 1. To acquire cultural refinement through appreciation and participation of dramas; 2. To give entertainment through our efforts; 3. To develop talent in various phases of dramatics; 4. To serve as an escape from reality.

The club will hold its next meeting tonight instead of Thursday as previously announced.

This notice remains the only manifesto of camp theater. Aside from the familiar call for talent, a number of significant details are found in this proclamation.

The “four-fold purposes” of the Little Theatre require some individual commentary.

1. To acquire cultural refinement . . .

The phrasing of this statement offers insight into the Nisei mind. The desire for the acquisition of cultural refinement strongly suggests a refinement which was sensed to be lacking. Therefore, the participants hoped to use theater to make up for this perceived
shortcoming, not solely for individual well-being but for the express purpose of assimilation into the mainstream of American society. This is not to say that the Nisei were unsophisticated by nature, but their experience in America certainly may have given them that impression. As previously argued, theater generally was not an activity most Nisei participated in prior to the internments. Indeed, a number of evacuees retained an interest in theater upon their release, but this was not an interest with which they entered camp. It is not unreasonable to assume that the acquisition of cultural refinement was meant for both the members as well as their prospective audiences. The placement of this purpose as the first on the list suggests it was of paramount importance to the Little Theatre.

2. To give entertainment . . .

This obvious criterion is noteworthy for its position as second on the list. It clues us into the fact that this theater group placed art above entertainment. The change from a "dramatics class" to a "little theatre type of organization" reflects a genuine interest in theater as art (as opposed to the "theater as extracurricular activity" found in High School theater). Clarence Arthur Perry's handbook, *The Work of the Little Theatres* (1933), defines the term in such a fashion: "Enterprises yielding box-office profits are not ruled out but, to come properly within our scope, they must be prompted by an artistic rather than by a commercial purpose" (9). Of course, commercial concerns could never be an important factor in camp theater of any kind, but the Tule Lake Little Theatre in particular made art its guiding principle. Morse Saito notes the artistic preferences of the group which were often at odds with audience desires: "While we like [sic] the heavier
stuff like Eugene O'Neil [sic] the audiences preferred any kind of escape comedies” (Undated).

3. To develop talent . . .

This purpose is a standard element in all announcements that a theater group was proposed. Although the education of group members was an important reason for such “on the job training,” as it was in High School theater, Barrack theater groups also needed a constant talent pool in order to sustain themselves. Offers to educate were in addition a way to recruit members who might otherwise have considered themselves too inexperienced to join a theater group.

4. To serve as an escape from reality.

Although alluded to by some internees years later, this marks the only time any theater group admitted to using theater as a coping mechanism during the internments. The phrasing seems purposely ambiguous, suggesting that both performers and spectators needed such an escape, actor Hiroshi Kashiwagi concurs with this assessment: “It served as an escape for people who came to see the plays, too.” It is equally unclear whether theater as an activity was meant to facilitate an escape or if the plays themselves were to serve as the vehicle of escapism, thus affecting the choice of plays to be produced. In either case, and both are certainly plausible together or separately, it was recognized that theater was a diversion of social and psychic proportions for the internees.

On August 26, 1942 the Little Theatre (as it was now known) announced a series of skits in conjunction with an oratorical contest. On the 27th the Little Theatre explained the nature of these skits: “[s]hort episodes depicting married life.” Hiroshi
Kashiwagi recalls being in one (or more) of these skits and offers a very practical reason for the emphasis on married life: “Well, people were of marriageable age at the time. . . . we were all about late teens or early twenties. I think I was 19. So the others were about the same age, maybe younger or older. That might be the reason.” Sylvia Junko Yanagisako explains that “more Nisei married [during the internment camp years] than had married during the entire prewar period” (74). “Indeed,” she argues, “camp life brought even greater opportunities for the Nisei to meet potential spouses than they had enjoyed in the prewar community” (74). Ironically, the WRA may take some credit for this phenomenon. The administration’s community-building system included socials, dances, and other activities in which the sexes could mingle freely. Apparently, the Little Theatre Nisei were receptive to the administration’s efforts and utilized theater as yet another outlet for male/female socialization. As with High School theater, the Tule Lake Little Theatre seemed, at first, to gear performances toward a specific group of internees—in particular the same group embraced by high schools. By performing outside of the high school, however, the Little Theatre guaranteed itself a more diverse, if not larger, audience.

The Tulean Dispatch continued to provide information about Little Theatre meetings throughout September 1942, culminating in a September 30 notice of tryouts in Barrack 1808 (the number 1808 represents Block 18, Barrack 8. At Tule Lake the eighth barrack in every block was the recreation hall). Kashiwagi does not remember what went on at that meeting, although he believes the “tryouts” were for parts, as opposed to auditions for membership. As for group leadership at the tryouts, he recalls Perry Saito

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and "Mrs. Murayama--Sada Murayama--who was an older person. She was the director of the theater. I don't know what background she had but she was older and we all thought she knew a lot."

Sada Murayama remains, along with Perry Saito, the driving force of the Tulalake Little Theatre. Unfortunately, little is known of this remarkable woman who served as the "artistic director" of the group and clearly was to them what the Caucasian teachers were to the high school drama clubs. Murayama directed all of the plays with the exception of one play, Angelpuss, written and directed by Garrett Starmer, a teacher at the high school. Those who remember Mrs. Murayama speak of her as a dignified and cultured woman. According to Morse Saito, it was Murayama who recruited Perry into the theater group:

Sada Murayama was older (remember: my 16 year old eyes!), very stately, poised and dignified organizer. Through the Rec[reation] department she recruited and drummed up interest. Perry was working as a Youth Social Director and jumped in though we had little experience in things other than school activities but not theater. In white communities like Aberdeen, Washington [from which the Saitos hailed], the only Japanese family is not going to be wanted in any theatrical performances unless they were looking for villains. No thanks. Obviously Sada Murayama was trained and had different experiences.

Sada Murayama recruited Georgette Yoshikai for the Little Theatre as well:

Was I interested in acting before I entered camp? I was offered the role of the maid by Sada Murayama. She was a great director, encouraging us to do the best within us and understanding that person we were acting as. (November 22, 1994)

Ms. Yoshikai also confirms that Sada Murayama chose the plays for the Little Theatre. It is obvious that Murayama's experience was atypical within the Japanese community. Garrett Starmer also remembers Sada Murayama: "She was in every respect . . . almost
an aristocratic lady who was delicate, sweet, understanding. Just a perfect lady.” It was
Murayama who recruited Starmer as well, asking for his help and producing his play,
\textit{Angelpuss}, during the Little Theatre’s brief but productive existence.

On October 3 the Little Theatre announced its intention to cast “the one-act plays
which the . . . organization recently acquired.” Just how these plays were acquired is
unknown, but a few facts suggest that they were not ordered individually from a
publisher such as Samuel French or Dramatists Play Service. Of the 15 plays produced
by the Tule Lake Little Theatre, four are in an anthology, \textit{Fifty Contemporary One-Act
Plays}, selected and edited by Frank Shay and Pierre Loving (1925). It is probable that
someone in the group, most likely Sada Murayama, owned a copy of this collection, as
well as other anthologies (or other individual copies of plays) since she seemed to have a
background in theater prior to the internments. It was the practice of the Little Theatre to
type copies of the plays either on ditto paper or the backs of unfolded playbills from
previous productions and to distribute them to the cast and crew, so limited theater funds
did not have to be expended for the mailing of plays. One play, \textit{Angelpuss}, was an
unpublished draft so copies were most likely made in the same fashion.

The Little Theatre announced its debut in the November 14 issue of the \textit{Dispatch}:

Final plans for the initial performance of the Little Theater Group
will be discussed at an important meeting at #408, Sunday 2:30 p.m.
Garret [sic] Starmer, instructor in the University of California
extension division, has consented to assist the group one night every week
on voice and diction. Classes in make-up, stage designing, directing, and
other phases of theater production are being planned.
Starmer was a professor of dramatics at Stanford University and
appeared on Broadway as an actor.
Reconstruction of Building 408 into a theater for stage plays is
being contemplated.
Miss Jeanette Smoyer, Tri-State high school drama instructor, will be present at the meeting Sunday. She and Mrs. Sada Murayama will read excerpts from the three-act play, "Yes, My Darling Daughter."

As was typical of the Dispatch, coverage of the theater group (alternatively spelled "er" or "re," although the latter was more common) was extensive, and this particular notice contains some items of interest. First, there is some misleading information about Garrett Starmer. Starmer, presently a speech therapist in Chico, California, was hired by the WRA soon after obtaining his California State teaching credentials from Stanford University in the Spring of 1942.

Then I guess one of the instructors at the Stanford School of Education or on the bulletin board told us about a recruiter who was coming down for the government school which was Tule Lake. It paid $1800. So I interviewed with the principal who was down on the Stanford campus and was accepted. In fact, I walked out of the first interview with the job in my pocket. So, I was there [at Tule Lake] for about eight months from about roughly September through May.

Starmer was a graduate student at Stanford, never rising to the title "Professor," and he has no independent recollection of ever teaching at UC Extension. In fact, he recalls only being involved with the Little Theatre--by Sada Murayama's invitation--in connection with his play, Angelpuss, a memory supported by Morse Saito who claims that Starmer came "later ... and added many professional touches to the group. He may deny it but he brought a lot of class to the Little Theater" (April 4, 1995). As for Starmer's Broadway credentials, this is true. Starmer originated the role of Hal in Aurania Rouverol's Growing Pains, a play written about Starmer and his friends (one of whom happened to be Rouverol's daughter, Jean). Why, then the emphasis on Caucasian service to the group? It is clear that Murayama and Saito controlled most aspects of the
theater, particularly artistic ones. Control of the Dispatch by the WRA is a possible explanation for the highlighting of Caucasian participation, although the camp administration most likely wanted it known that Nisei and Caucasians could cooperate (as long as Caucasians were in charge). Having the formation of a theater group seem like a joint venture at least gave the appearance of community in the partitioned internment camp.

As for the classes in theater production planned by the Little Theatre, no such offerings were ever publicized after this announcement. This is not surprising given that instruction in theater, although part of the Little Theatre’s manifesto of August 1942, was not as vital an issue as it was at high schools. In addition, tense conditions at Tule Lake eventually made extracurricular activities somewhat scarce; even the Little Theatre had to disband less than a year after its inception. However, in November 1942, it seemed as though theater would flourish to become a camp-wide activity.

It is obvious that the Little Theatre wanted to bring itself to its audience, rather than having its audience find it, an accessibility to the arts unknown in High School theater. The November 25 issue of the Dispatch announced the presentation of three one-act plays starting, ironically, December 7; “Tentative plans call for the group to tour the Project every other week until the whole center has been canvassed.” Such a decision reflects the Little Theatre’s commitment to the psychological needs of its constituency for it clearly sensed the frustrations of the internees (and, perhaps, the mounting tension at camp) and sought to find access to as many victims as possible. Their plan to travel the project was not implemented because Barrack 408 was converted into a permanent
theater, but the intention of the group to use theater to heal, to uplift, and to legitimize participation in the mainstream is unmistakable. In what is perhaps the next best solution to the obstacles faced by a traveling troupe, the Little Theatre decided to offer performances for each of Tule Lake’s seven wards on seven different nights. Ticket prices were set at 10¢ for an 8 p.m. curtain in Barrack 408. One-hundred eighty tickets were set aside for each ward, 20 to a block, and any ward which could assure an audience of 100 guaranteed a repeat performance for others in the ward the following night.

**Barrack 408**

Barrack 408, nothing more than a 100 x 20 wooden structure with a multitude of windows, housed the Tule Lake Little Theatre for its entire existence. Some information is known about the theater itself. A platform approximately 12 feet across and 12 feet wide placed against the short end of the barrack and raised approximately 12 inches served as the stage. At first the stage was level, but later it was raked for better visibility. Garrett Starmer recalls “sitting in the audience during rehearsals [of his play, *Angelpuss*] looking at eye level up to the stage.” A small dressing room was set up behind the stage with mirrors for the performers to put on makeup. The stage apparently had curtains both in front of it and behind it, masking the backstage area. Actor George Katagiri claims to “vaguely remember a sliding curtain which separated the stage from the audience” (October 3, 1994). The long audience area could hold approximately 100-150 spectators, seated on, according to actor Jiro Shimoda, “home-made benches [or] borrowed benches from the church” (September 23, 1994). According to Hiroshi Kashiwagi, the theater had
no amplification ("the sound sort of just traveled straight back"), a crude lighting system (no dimmers), and curtains covering the many windows in the barrack, although these were a later addition "to make it look more like a theater." "Most of the standard theater stuff," as Garrett Starmer recollects, "was there but it was somewhat makeshift."

Makeup, also, was rudimentary but effective. George Katagiri "enjoyed this aspect as much as acting" (September 22, 1994); "Using make-up and cold cream was novel and I was impressed with how it changed or enhanced one's appearance. I introduced it to my three sons who are now grown and they, in turn, use it with themselves and their children at Halloween" (October 3, 1994).

Because the internees had time on their hands, rehearsals were long, frequent, and, often, simultaneous with those for the next bill of shows. Georgette Yoshikai recalls that she was "made to practice long hours"; Hiroshi Kashiwagi remembers that other than his job as a waiter, he had plenty of free time: "It was only during meals that I was busy . . . The rest of the time I was free so I could learn my part, rehearse." Even during the run of the shows, Kashiwagi notes that rehearsals for the next bill were underway. Such strict schedules were imposed by the group itself. They reflect not only a means to combat boredom but also the Little Theatre's commitment to art and its desire to offer well-rehearsed, polished shows. Georgette Yoshikai concurs: "By long rehearsals, it was for perfection as close to it as we could give."

Aside from being an actor, Jiro Shimoda served as the Business Manager of the Little Theatre starting in January 1943. He vividly recalls the process of ticket distribution and fund allocation for each set of performances:
We had tickets (10¢ each) distributed to each block manager, but then I had to go around to every block manager's office to collect [the money] the following week which was a lot of walking around the entire camp. The money was turned into the recreation department, which in turn paid for our props, makeup and expenses. (September 23, 1994)

This system provides insights into the level of control the administration had over the Little Theatre. As Morse Saito remarked, "[i]t would be naive to claim the camp was not closely supervised," but this does not mean that the Little Theatre did not enjoy some level of artistic freedom. Acting as producers, the administration funneled internee ticket money into future productions. No actors or crew members were paid, although the officers of the group, under the auspices of the Recreation Department, were. Jiro Shimoda, whose "Notice of Assignment" dated January 19, 1943 describes his job as "Youth Activity Leader," was paid $16 a month for his services. Unlike most High School productions (where the administration also served as producers), plays were chosen by the participants, usually Murayama and Saito, but it is not known if the plays they chose had to meet approval from the administration. This does not appear to be the case, though, for neither Garrett Starmer nor Hiroshi Kashiwagi recall any administrative "Master of Revels." Furthermore, it appears as though the administration was more interested in sabotage that might affect the war effort, as Morse Saito has previously opined. The Little Theatre clearly posed no military threat to this effort. Finally, if the administration was truly worried about sabotage of any kind, their paranoia would have led them to reject a number of the plays chosen, particularly Eugene O'Neill's *Ile* and *The Valiant* by Middlemass and Hall. Both plays contain striking metaphors for the conditions of the internments.
Each bill was composed of three one-act plays, distinguished by genre as “comedy,” “tragedy,” and “fantasy.” The reasons for these rather well-rounded programs is not entirely clear. Hiroshi Kashiwagi believes that Perry Saito and Sada Murayama made the decision to classify plays by genre. Jiro Shimoda attaches little significance to genre considerations: “I don’t think there were any underlying motives in choosing the plays. We did what was available and what we thought would be entertaining.” Garrett Starmer concurs: “I don’t think too much should be made [of genre] sociologically . . . or psychologically. I think it was just good theater. This is what we always tried to do, was to have a sample of every type of drama.” However, Morse Saito acknowledges that the Little Theatre “preferred the serious plays which they felt was real dramatics and fine literature.” In addition to this preference, Saito and Murayama also knew that to reach as wide an audience as possible, something for everyone would have to be offered: “With a wide range in audience preferences,” Morse Saito remembers, “evenings of one act performances were most in demand... Rare was the play which everyone liked” (April 4, 1995). Apparently, the decision to offer three plays of varying genre was an attempt to increase spectatorship, please as many as possible, offer parts to as many members as could be accommodated, display versatility, and to make time spent in the theater meaningful on many psychological levels. “Escape was vital,” says Morse Saito, but escape was not achieved exclusively through comedy (as was the case at most High School productions). Saito and Murayama wanted spectators to escape not only through laughter (comedy) and adventure (fantasy), but most importantly through appreciation of what they may have considered the finer arts (tragedy). Their three play bills served well
the purposes set forth in the Little Theatre’s manifesto: to escape, to entertain, and to acquire cultural refinement.

The First Bill: December 7-21, 1942

Reminders of the Little Theatre’s upcoming bill of plays were posted frequently in the Dispatch. On December 7, 1942 a lengthy review of the troupe’s first offerings was printed. This performance was a preview for the administration and the newspaper, but Hiroshi Kashiwagi doesn’t believe the Caucasians paid for their tickets. Such previews were perhaps a means to win favor with the two entities which could shut down operations of the Little Theatre rather quickly; if so, this marks the only instance in camp theater history where the role of the critic was so vital. Also, if critical acclaim was forthcoming, the Little Theatre would be guaranteed a following which in turn would facilitate their attempts to reach as many fellow internees as possible.

The review itself is a thoughtful one, penned by “H.M.I.,” Howard M. Imazeki, Managing Editor of the Dispatch:

It amazed me pleasantly to discover the genuine histrionic talent inherent [sic] in some of our young colonists in Tule Lake. Previewing the presentations of three one-act plays by the Little Theater Group Friday night in #408, it came to me that there is a great possibility of developing this sort of group here to entertain the mentally matured residents who are forever seeking escape from the grim reality of drab colony life.

Drama always acts as a cathartic of emotions. It makes people weep and laugh. If any play stirs a person’s feeling, it has accomplished the first essence of its raison d’etre and fine art. The Little Theater players did this to the audience Friday night. And I believe they will continue to do so during the two-week performances with greater intensity.

Especially noteworthy was the performance of Grace Yamadera as Mrs. Anna Keeney in Eugene O’Neill’s tragedy, “Ile.” Miss Yamadera,
we learned, has never been on the stage before. But her dramatic quality of self-expression portrayed the role she was assigned with understanding and appreciation. In a way she surpassed the fine acting of Perry Saito as Captain Dave Keeney.

George Kelly’s comedy, “The Flattering Word,” brought the house down with laughter. But the final five minutes were anti-climax. The curtain should have been drawn while the punch was still alive. Five Stars for Dickie Moriyasu for her smooth and professional acting; Four Stars for Hiroshi Kashiwagi. Mr. Kashiwagi, I believe, is destined to shine brilliantly later.

“Maker of Dreams,” a fantasy by Oliphant Down, was in need of a larger stage and a better lighting system to inject color to the play that it deserves. But, then, we would be expecting too much from the present camp facilities. If we had one, we would have seen more ballet dancing from Yukio Shimoda the talented terpsichorean [sic].

Congratulations to Mrs. Sada Murayama for her excellent job as director and also to Garrett Starmer and Miss Jeanette Smoyer, high school faculty members, for their finishing touch.

The Little Theater Group deserves our whole-hearted support.

As rare as reviews in camp newspapers were, this particular type of review is rarer still. It is clear that Imazeki attempted to offer a balanced critique, sparing no criticism nor withholding praise. He recognizes the limitations of Barrack 408 but demonstrates a genuine appreciation for the efforts of the participants. More importantly, Imazeki places theater in a specific cultural context by discussing how it functions vis-a-vis “the mentally matured residents who are forever seeking escape from the grim reality of drab colony life.” These observations concerning the audience’s need for theater became a mainstay of Dispatch reporting and as time went on the paper often took on the role of audience advocate, at times admonishing the Little Theatre for failing to recognize audience desire for other types of plays (as Morse Saito has indicated). At the same time, however, this review senses the need for cultural refinement among the spectators when
it talks of “fine art”—a comment which surely would have pleased the authors of the Little Theatre’s manifesto.

The plays themselves differ markedly from those chosen by High School theater groups, although the comedy, *The Flattering Word* (1918), certainly echoes the tone of High School productions. George Kelly’s lighthearted look at the often strained relationship between the church and the theater involves a “prominent dramatic star” (275), Eugene Tesh, and his visit to the home of the Reverend Loring Rigley. Reverend Rigley distains the theater, but Tesh reveals the secret to changing the Reverend’s opinion: “[T]hat is the flattering word; the one compliment that has never failed. Tell any man, woman or child that he should be on the stage,—and you’ll find him quite as susceptible as a cat is to catnip” (283). It is the play’s theatrical self-referentiality that makes it a delightful choice for the Little Theatre, one which I suspect someone with a good amount of knowledge of the theater, such as Sada Murayama, would find particularly enjoyable.

It is thought that the three plays followed a particular order of performance. The first play was always the comedy. As Morse Saito explains, “Something light for the kiddies and after they fell asleep then into a heavier play. . . . Taking time out for stage settings between one act plays may seem a good way to lose any audience but instead it gave people a chance to go home and put some little one to bed” (April 4, 1995). This is a very practical solution to both the performers’ need to change sets and the spectators’ need to put the children to bed. However, one may also speculate if it was considered appropriate for children to witness the “heavier” plays which followed the comedy.
Saito’s recollection also implies that individual sets were “designed” to suit the plays; the three plays did not “share” a single set nor did they utilize an empty space and some symbolic props to suggest a set. It is known that sound effects and lighting, however crude, were employed to heighten the sense of realism on the stage. Finally, it is also known that Sada Murayama introduced each play before it commenced. As Hiroshi Kashiwagi remembers, “We would need a little time to change the set and she’d go out there and say something. She was very charming.”

The fantasy chosen for the first bill of plays, Oliphant Down’s The Maker of Dreams (1913) is typical of Barrack theater in that it requires a very small cast (3), a further indication that the Little Theatre was not an extracurricular activity (such as high school productions which purposely sought plays with large casts), but rather was designed to work within the fabric of daily camp life. The play involves two performers, Pierrot, a singer/poet, and Pierrette, a dancer, living together in an old cottage. They have had some trouble securing audiences for their shows and are therefore in dire need financially. Both exhibit a cynicism about life, as seen in this exchange initiated by Pierrette darning Pierrot’s socks:

PIERROT. Darning indeed! I hope life has got something better in it than darning.
PIERRETTE. I doubt it. It’s pretty much the same all the world over. First we wear holes in our socks, and then we mend them. The wise ones are those who make the best of it, and darn as well as they can. (262)

It seems reasonable to assume that such a statement resonated with the spectators, particularly in its philosophy of non-confrontation and acceptance; Japanese attitudes toward assimilation have been defined by Harry H.L. Kitano as “a strategy of
accommodation” (3). In addition, it was such a philosophy that the Little Theatre tried to implement in its attempt to acculturate internees through theater and to re-emphasize national identity.

The third character in Down’s fantasy is the mysterious Manufacturer who makes dreams. Posing as part Cupid, part deity, he tries to get Pierrot to realize that his search for true love should begin and end right within the walls of his own home. The Manufacturer claims to have made a lover for Pierrot and he hints that she is near to him: “Whilst you are striding along gazing at the stars, you may be treading on a little glowworm” (269). This “glowworm,” of course, turns out to be Pierrette, who has suffered in her unrequited love for Pierrot. The play ends on the hopeful note that they will now find happiness not from money but from love.

Eugene O’Neill’s Ile (1917) offers no such happy resolution. Set on board a whaling ship stuck behind a wall of ice, the play involves the tensions experienced by Captain Keeney and his crew as a result of their isolation. Keeney has promised his crew that he will release them after two years of service, which, as the play opens, has just ended. However, Keeney stubbornly refuses to return home, waiting instead for the ice wall to break so that he may embark on his mission to bring home a load of whale “ile” (oil). Compounding these pressures is Keeney’s wife who teeters on the brink of madness as a result of her confinement. Just as Keeney gives in to his wife’s pleading (after having defeated an attempted mutiny by his crew), he gets word that the ice has broken. He charts a course forward as Mrs. Keeney descends into madness, playing “wildly and discordantly” on her organ (475).
Some information about the performances of *Ile* is known. Hiroshi Kashiwagi, who appeared in both *The Flattering Word* and *The Maker of Dreams*, recalls the lighting and sound effects used to reproduce the feeling of the sea:

*Ile* was very simple. As I recall they had a kind of colored, blue lights... they got the sea effect with noise [and] sound effects. They did really create the feeling of sea. They had this organ which this actress [Grace Yamadera] managed to play in such a way that it was very dramatic. It showed her mind going. I remember that she was so good doing that.

Ms. Yamadera, “the Helen Hayes of Tule” according to Georgette Yoshikai (October 17, 1994), made memorable the role of Mrs. Keeney for her as well: “One would think actresses like Grace Yamadera who could bring tears to the audience when there was sadness in the play would have pursued the film industry” (November 22, 1994).

Kashiwagi believes that the sound effects he referred to were on record, perhaps borrowed from the camp record collection or brought to the group by Garrett Starmer. Starmer, who recalls nothing about working on this bill of shows, does remember such records:

I remember the sound effects records, and they were on those disks that would break so easily. I do remember the cardboard disks and it was probably a copy made of a professional sound effects record which I don’t think I took up there [to Tule Lake], but I remember having such a record of various sound effects.

It is clear that sound effects records were used in other productions at Tule Lake. Jiro Shimoda has given me one of these records, which are just as Starmer remembers them: thin cardboard disks. The Shimoda record contains two sound effects: “Car stopping” and “Car horn.”

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Of the three plays presented on the first bill, *Ile* contains the most telling metaphors for internment camp existence. It is interesting to speculate if the spectators felt kinship with Keeney’s exasperated crew and its feelings of betrayal toward the stubborn captain, who may have seemed uncomfortably akin to Uncle Sam to the deceived Nisei. Perhaps it was the play’s emphasis on isolation, alienation, and, in the character of Mrs. Keeney, madness, that reverberated with the evacuees; similar responses may also have been felt during *The Maker of Dreams*. In any case, the purpose of this production was not to fuel the fires of bitterness and anger—those feelings could be easily aroused via any activity within the internment camp—nor was it to engender feelings of resignation over the internments (the crew fails in its mutiny attempt). Rather, Saito and Murayama hoped to acculturate through entertainment, and through acculturation, to re-establish national identity in the minds of spectators and performers alike.

"The Great American Tragedy"

On occasion, the *Tulean Dispatch* published a special "Magazine Section," roughly equivalent to the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, featuring short pieces of fiction, essays, and human interest stories. The January 1943 "Holiday Edition" is the only supplement to include a one-act play, T. Nakamura’s *The Great American Tragedy*. Labeled a comedy, the play succinctly captures the confusion and bitterness surrounding the decision to evacuate persons of Japanese ancestry:

*The Great American Tragedy*
CAST: Father, mother, Mary, Tom, and a Caucasian lady.
SCENE: Living room piled with duffle bags, suit cases and packing boxes. Feverish preparation is being made for packing prior to evacuation the next day.

As the scene opens mother and daughter are in the room packing. Tom is wandering around the room with a paper in hand, pickling his way around a bedlam of half-opened suitcases.

MOTHER: For goodness sake, stop talking and help with the packing. The train leaves early tomorrow morning for Arizona and we haven’t even finished packing yet. What if we miss the train?

TOM: Let the train go. We’ll stay behind. This whole evacuation is unconstitutional. I’ll bring this to the highest court in the country. (He strikes a dramatic pose by standing on one of the boxes.) Are we citizens or not? The constitution, the most sacred document in the land, states that no person shall be deprived of his liberty without due process of law. What crime have we committed? What are we being punished for? Where is the Bill of Rights? Tell me where is it?

(At this point [FATHER] enters the room. He holds a bottle of whiskey in his hand. He is shirtless. A suspender is draped over his underwear.)

FATHER: My God! No liquor allowed at the camp. They say we’re going to be there for the duration. What am I going to drink for the New Years. No liquor! What a long dry spell this is going to be. This is the last bottle I’ll see for a long, long time. (He seats himself and takes a drink and then pours one for TOM. MOTHER[,] who has been running among the various things scattered about the floor[,] straightens up holding a gleaming kitchen knife in her hand.)

MOTHER: Now, where will I put this? I want to put this in a safe place so it won’t be damaged. This is my best kitchen knife.

MARY (In a horrified voice): But, mother you can’t bring that. It’s against regulation. Knife is a contraband.

FATHER (Muttering): No liquor either.

MOTHER: Contraband? I don’t understand that kind of talk[ ] This is my favorite knife and I’m bringing it along. For 20 years I’ve used it to prepare your meals and I’m not going to part with it now. What harm can an old woman like me do. (She brandishes her knife and continues talking in a[n] angry voice while sister, brother, father gather around trying to calm her.) Are they afraid that I’ll lead an uprising? What does General DeWitt know about kitchen knife? Bring him here. I’ll talk to him.

SISTER: Please mother. Don’t talk like that. The F.B.I. might hear you and send us to Missoula, Montana. (The group finally succeed[s] in calming her down and sister gingerly takes the knife away. Mother sits down with a resigned look on her face. Father and Tom go back to their drinking.)
SISTER: Mother, will you help me bring the blankets in from the bedroom. (They both leave.)
(An old Caucasian lady dressed shoddily enters.)
LADY: I'm sorry to see you people leave like this. I just came to see if you have any furniture to sell. I've been to several places but I couldn't find what I wanted. Have you---?
TOM (Jumping to his feet): Sorry to see us go? Like hell you are. You knew weeks ago that we were leaving. But you waited until now so we'll be forced to sell at any price. Get out of here! (The lady leaves hurriedly.)
FATHER: You shouldn't have been so hasty. Maybe we could have sold her that old rocking chair with one arm missing I bought from a second-hand store back in 1910. It's been lying in the woodshed for the last five years. Maybe if we leave it out in the front porch with a big sign-- "Evacuation Sale, Cheap."--somebody might buy it.
TOM: Well, let's go look at it. (They exit.)
END

It is not known who T. Nakamura is or if he is an Issei or Nisei, although his portrayal of generational conflicts suggest that he is Nisei. He does not seem to have been associated with either the Dispatch or the Little Theatre staffs. His first name may well be Tom, the angry Nisei of his play. Nakamura paints an unflattering picture of the Issei generation with a Father concerned solely with his liquor and a Mother brought to near-hysterics because of a kitchen knife. On the other hand, the Nisei Tom and Mary-- the only characters allowed names, not familial roles, for identification--seem level-headed and righteously outraged over the mistreatment of American citizens. Such portrayals show Nakamura's awareness of the Dispatch's readership which was most likely predominantly Nisei (Japanese-speaking Issei were afforded a few pages every issue written entirely in Japanese) and therefore sympathetic to Tom's impassioned plea for justice under the Constitution, and the view that the Issei were hopelessly out of touch with the magnitude of the injustice of the internments. However, Nakamura's depiction
of the Issei parents may be a gross overstatement. Robert O'Brien remarks that in many
respects “the Issei felt evacuation more keenly than did the [Nisei]” (44). The Issei
presented in *The Great American Tragedy* may simply represent the opinion of the
majority of Nisei who blamed the Issei for their predicament (as the Issei did the Nisei).
Still, this play is valuable as one of the very few original plays written during the
internment to have been preserved and to have enjoyed (presumably) a wide readership.
That its subject matter is the internments themselves makes it a particularly effective
work of art.

**The Second Bill: January 18-23, 1943**

The January 9, 1943 issue of the *Dispatch* announced,

**LI’L THEATER TO GIVE DRAMA**

For its January presentation, The Little Theater has chosen
“Grandma Pulls The Strings [sic],” “Beauty and the Jacobin,” and “The
Boor” which will start with Ward I on Jan. 18.

The plays will be shown at the Little Theater building #408
starting from 8:15 p.m. Tickets will soon be on sale at all block
managers’ offices at 10¢ apiece. Admission at the door will be 15¢.

The following is the schedule of performances: Monday, Jan. 18--
Ward 1. Tuesday, Jan. 19--Ward 2. Thursday, Jan. 21--Ward 3. Friday,

January 13 featured another announcement, this one explaining that the doors of the
theater would open at 7:45 p.m. and that “tickets will be sold 5 days before the date of
performance at the block manager’s office.”

What is more interesting about the January 13 notice is the genre labels given to
the plays. *Grandma Pulls the String* is labeled “a light comedy,” *Beauty and the Jacobin*
a "drama," and _The Boor_ "a serious comedy." These modifications on "comedy," "fantasy," and "tragedy" may imply a recognition that lighter fare was more to the liking of the audience; later audience responses would confirm this interpretation. "Tragedy" may have been deemed too "heavy" for the spectators who were, after all, suffering through their own personal and group tragedies. However, the reason for the change may simply have been that such appellations were more apropos to the plays being presented.

Using the limited Little Theatre vocabulary which described the first set of plays, _Beauty and the Jacobin_ defies any label other than "drama," and _The Boor_, while a comedy, is not quite the farce that is _Grandma Pulls the String_, nor a fantasy or a tragedy. The designation "serious comedy" may have been used to distinguish the play from _Grandma_, and may have been used only because of the reputation of Chekhov.

_The Boor_, one of the plays included in the aforementioned _Fifty Contemporary One-Act Play_ (where the playwright's last name is spelled "Tchekoff"), is a rather light-hearted play (Chekhov himself considered it a "vaudeville." Hingley vii) in which a young widow, still in mourning over the loss of her husband seven months earlier, is confronted by a boorish creditor seeking payment. She puts him off as he fumes and eventually they nearly come to a gun duel. The end of the play shows both characters loving and hating each other:

SMIRNOV. This is fine,—all I needed was to fall in love. To-morrow I have to pay my interest, the hay harvest has begun and then you appear. _[He takes her in his arms]._ I can never forgive myself.

MRS. POPOV. Go away! Take your hands off me! I hate you— you— this is— [A long kiss]. (235)
This sudden conversion is not really explained in the play, giving the piece a farcical tone. Smirnov in particular has a number of lengthy speeches which, if not well-paced, might surely have slowed the play's pace. Other than that, the play presents no great difficulties in staging, set, lighting, or costuming.

*Beauty and the Jacobin*, on the other hand, might indeed be problematic given all of these concerns. Booth Tarkington's French Revolution-era play involves three aristocrats attempting to forge documents to get them out of France. A sadistic officer, who has been following the three around the country, suddenly arrives looking to arrest (and eventually behead) them. The action of the play, such as it is, concerns a frantic Eloise attempting to convince Valsin that she is not a citizen of some stature, but rather an innocent to be left alone. Their discussion lasts throughout the play with the revelation that Valsin was once greatly in love with Eloise, only to lose her to an equally sadistic army officer, who turns out to be one of Eloise's companions, Louis. The three eventually manage to escape (with Louis in drag), and although Eloise is convinced that she has bested Valsin, the truth is that Valsin allows them to leave; "Can't we have a little fun as we go along?" he laughingly remarks as the curtain falls (100).

While the "Year of the Terror" certainly backgrounds the limited action of the play, and sets up its major conflict, *Beauty and the Jacobin* is a story of revenge and love gone sour. As a result, it is a very "talky" play which may have given the generally unskilled Little Theatre players some trouble. It is not known how this play was costumed nor how the setting of the lodging-house was reproduced (if at all), although the playbill acknowledges the help of "Mr. Slattery & [the] Construction Dept." It is
possible that a door was built, perhaps as a permanent feature of the stage for this series of plays. A door is important in the play; Louis and Anne hide behind it (supposedly in an adjoining room) and Eloise makes obvious gestures toward the door, indicating to Valsin that she is lying about being alone.

On January 20 the Dispatch devoted an entire page to the Little Theatre productions, offering not one but two reviews. This is indeed a rare occurrence as reviews in general were few at the camps. The first review, reproduced below, was generally enthusiastic:

"GRANDMA PULLS THE STRINGS [sic]" IS A ROLLICKING COMEDY

By George J. Makamura

This way, sir. Two seats to your right. Lights out! Curtain!

One of the most choiciest bits of entertainment regaled a first-nighter audience with a "comedy-in-every-sense-of-the[-]word" on the Little Theater stage, #408, Saturday when the drama group under Mrs. Sada Murayama presented their second production.

"Grandma Pulls the String," a witty down-to-earth comedy, and nine-year-old Nancy Motomasu literally stole the show. The play evolved around a fussy old grandma who wanted her granddaughter Julia (Helen Nakagawa) to be proposed [sic] in her own way and "hung" around the parlor to see to it. Little Nancy had her ideas too.

The nervous suitor acted by Gene Kubo groped and sweated through an excruciatingly hilarious 15 minutes with his knees on the floor asking for Julia's hand.

Because "Grandma Pulls the String" afforded little of the more dramatic stances and speeches required in the other two plays on the evening's program, because of its frivolity and home-spun nature, the play moved fast and appealed delightfully to both young and old.

Although many of the issei scattered in the audience didn't understand a word of English, the "slapsticks" rendering every line a punch had them "rolling in the aisle." Yoshie Furuta deftly represented the cracky-voiced, obstinate old grandma in a wheelchair.

"THE BOOR"

The audience felt that "The Boor," also a one-act comedy presented earlier in the evening, was unwisely selected for the group of
players who had their limitations. Several quips were lost because of poor diction. Lengthly [sic] dialogues nearly ruined it.

However, Grace Yamadera expertly handled her difficult assignment and immersed herself in the character of a mourning widow with naturalness and finesse.

SAITO IMPROVES

Perry Saito is rapidly improving. His role as vociferous Valsin in "Beauty and the Jacobin" could have been tailor-made for his characterization. Suteko Sakuma and Keiko Yatsu, relatively new faces on the stage, were indeed excellent in their appearance.

AUDIENCE REACTIONS

Comments of the audience were invariably enthusiastic.

"This is the first time I’ve attended a Little Theater play here. I didn’t expect them to be so good," Block 7 Manager M. Maruyama remarked.

"It was thoroughly enjoyable," said Grace Asai. "I wouldn’t have missed it for the world."

Bob Ota, another first-nighter who was among the howling audience, said it was better than going to a movie.

ADMISSION 10¢

Performances will be repeated by Wards until the entire Colony has had a chance to attend. Tickets are on sale at all Block Manager’s office at ten cents each.

It is easy to forgive the compositional errors (were Gene Kubo’s knees really asking for Julia’s hand?) in this telling review whose value lies not in its praise of the performers but in its assessment of audience response. It seems apparent that the comedies were the most enthusiastically received; more space was awarded to plays favored by the reviewer who may or may not represent the general audience response.

Under this system, Grandma Pulls the String seems to have been preferred over The Boor, and both comedies favored over Beauty and the Jacobin, which earns barely a mention in this review. Makamura’s implications provide some insight as to the tastes of the internee spectators and may reflect a general feeling that theater in an internment camp should consist of light-hearted entertainment, free of "dramatic stances and
speeches.” This review is also useful as an indicator of who attended these plays: predominantly the Nisei. Without knowing how this reviewer defines “young” and “old,” it is still reasonable to assume that the audiences were multigenerational and of various ages. Thus, the Little Theatre performed before a much broader audience (in terms of age) than High School theater. The Issei “scattered in the audience” were most likely there because of a son or daughter who was performing.

Alongside Makamura’s review was Ken Hayashi’s “The Other Side,” which, as the title indicates, offered an alternative view of the Little Theatre’s second bill:

PREFERS SHORT SNAPPY PLAYS

Some fine acting was turned in by members of the Little Theater Group at the preview of its January series of one-act plays, Saturday night at #408.

In Anton Tchekov’s “The Boor” Jiro Shimoda, as Luka, Grace Yamadera, as Mrs. Popov and Ted Tokuno, as Smirnov turned in fair performances.

The second play, Booth Tarkington’s “Beauty and the Jacobin” revealed some decent talent under difficult conditions. Keiko Yatsu, Hiroshi Kashiwagi and Suteko Sakuma deserve mention for their performances. Perry and Morse Saito struggled creditably. P. Saito’s role looked like a tough baby.

Rough in spots, but a welcome relief after the two heavies was the Delano-Carb “Grandma Pulls the Strings” [sic].

This comedy, dealing with a young couple in love, provides some real hilarity. Little Nancy Motomasu, playing Nancy, stole the show with her excellent acting. Yoshie Furuta, as the interfering Grandma, was good.

Two new performers, Helen Nakagawa and Gene Kubo as the lovers, did well for their initial try.

Living here as we are this corner feels that from a psychological and emotional standpoint, we do not go so strongly for these long, drawn out Mid-Victorian plays.

Something short, snappy or at least a little lighter in vein should go over more in this project.
Hayashi's comments, like Makamura's, shed very little light on the performances themselves, but offer valuable insights on the reaction of the spectators. Both parties agree that the lighter the fare, the more favorably will it be received. However, Hayashi sounds somewhat resentful that the Little Theatre would deem to produce plays that were not pure comedies; even though the Chekhov piece is indeed a comedy by definition, Hayashi seems to be looking for more contemporary farces, played strictly for laughs.

Hayashi is also one of the only "outsiders" (that is, someone not a member of a theater group) to offer the conditions of confinement as justification for the need for comedy. Through his words we can begin to gauge the efficacy of the Little Theatre's efforts (with an eye toward their manifesto of 1942). If Hayashi's (and to some extent Makamura's) comments are to be taken as the general voice of the spectators, then Saito and Murayama may have set for themselves very difficult and unobtainable goals. For spectators wanting entertainment of the comic variety, loftier plays meant to familiarize audiences with a range of Western genres were inappropriate choices indeed. Granted, the Little Theatre meant to acculturate through drama subtly, but even the most subtle message may not have been properly received by an audience seeking escapism through laughter. While their manifesto recognizes the need for escapism, the Little Theatre does not specify—as the reviewers do—that only the genre of comedy provides the necessary escape. This is not to say that the goal of acculturation could not be reached, nor that a few (or perhaps many) spectators did not come away with some appreciation for the art of theater, but these reviews indicate that the Little Theatre was not dealing with minds devoid of artistic sense (at least as far as theater was concerned). The Nisei, while
generally unacculturated in the arts, still possessed taste in art and contextualized their
situation vis a vis theater in ways that the Little Theatre either did not figure or thought it
could overcome.

Hayashi's review also offers information about the order of plays performed that
contradict the remembrances of some participants. As noted earlier, Morse Saito recalls
that the bills always started with the comedy, which was enjoyed by children as well as
adults, and then an intermission allowed parents to put the children to bed and come back
for the "heavier" plays. But Hayashi indicates that the comedy, *Grandma Pulls the
String*, was performed last. The playbill for this series actually numbers the plays in the
order Hayashi reviews them: *The Boor, Beauty and the Jacobin*, and *Grandma Pulls the
String*. The order would seem immaterial (the plays could have been performed in any
order regardless of the playbill) if not for Hayashi's remark that *Grandma Pulls the
String* was "a welcome relief after the two heavies." A number of speculations may be
raised from this information. First, it is possible that the order of the plays was
completely arbitrary and intermissions were not meant to get the children off to bed;
Saito's remark may have simply been an observation that some parents adhered to such a
practice. Second, the Little Theatre may not have set an age requirement for
acculturation, and while the youngest children may not have gained aesthetic awareness
from any of the plays, older children may have attained something from any genre. Thus,
the order of the plays may have been unimportant. Third, it is possible that Saito and
Murayama did indeed understand the biases of their audience and therefore placed the
comedy last purposely. That way, the spectators had to sit through the "heavies" first in
anticipation of a lightening of the psychic load during the comedy. Given the importance placed on genre by the Little Theatre, I believe that this scenario is probably the most plausible, particularly because of the issue of acculturation through art.

**The Third Bill: February 22-26, 1943**

The February series of the Tule Lake Little Theatre turns out to be the last monthly performance they were able to mount. An announcement in the *Dispatch* on February 13 named the plays planned: *The Boy Comes Home* by A. A. Milne, *Peggy* by Rachel Crothers, and Garrett Starmer's *Angelpuss*; a similar notice on February 17 includes a schedule and a cast list. Once again, the genre labels of "comedy," "tragedy," and "fantasy" were compromised; *The Boy Comes Home* and *Angelpuss* are listed as comedies while *Peggy* sports the name of "serious drama." This may reflect a recognition upon the Little Theater’s part that comedies must take precedence over all other genres if an audience is to be secured. At this point of their existence, the Little Theatre was more or less a known entity afforded (for an internment camp) extensive coverage in the newspaper; it seems reasonable to assume that some aesthetic concerns were compromised to get as many people seeing the plays as possible. In addition, the generally supportive *Dispatch* had a penchant for reporting audience response to the plays selected by the Little Theatre (usually from the perspective of how appropriate they were for an internment camp audience). It would have been foolish for Saito and Murayama to ignore their “constituency.”
There is some confusion as to the dates of performance for this third bill. Originally scheduled to debut on February 22, the February 25 Dispatch announced its cancellation "until further notice." Those who had already purchased tickets were assured that their tickets would be valid when performances resumed. However, the review on March 1 indicates a debut of February 20, which leads one to ask why the paper waited ten days to print a review—particularly a paper like the Dispatch which was very supportive of the Little Theatre’s efforts and timely in its reviews. A few possible explanations may be offered. First, the February 20 date could be a misprint and the series could have been postponed for a fewer number of days. Second, the cancellation may have occurred during the run. Perhaps a performance (dress rehearsal?) was held prior to the debut date (as was the case with the first series where the administration and the newspaper were given a special showing), and then cancelled for ten days. The Dispatch, in this scenario, chose to print its review when it knew the performances were to resume.

Whatever the problem with dates, the reason for the cancellation is known: the aforementioned registration dilemma. The registration process began at Tule Lake on February 10 with very few internees cooperating with the Army. By the middle of February, the camp went through a series of petitions against registration followed by a group of youths demanding applications for repatriation (which were refused). Meanwhile, the army pursued what they termed “pro-Japanese agitators” within the camp. A second group of youths demanding expatriation instead of registration were forced out of camp by the Military Police and put in jail. Their incarceration is now
known as the Block 42 incident and it took place on February 21, the day before the
scheduled debut of the third series (or, perhaps, the day after the initial preview).

Hiroshi Kashiwagi remembers the registration incidents well and discussed their
impact on the Little Theatre in an interview with me:

RC: On February 22, 1943 the performances of the Little Theatre were
cancelled until further notice. Do you remember that?
HK: Yeah.
RC: Why?
HK: That’s because of the registration.
RC: Did you register?
HK: Not for a long time. . . There was a lot of trouble there [at the camp].
I mean, they ordered us to register and answer this loyalty question. I
remember withdrawing from the play but I didn’t know that they officially
postponed the plays.
RC: So you pulled out because of the problem with the registration?
Specifically because you wouldn’t register?
HK: It was very Americanized. The Little Theatre was very
Americanized and we were having this bit about whether to be assimilated
or not. Anyway, because I didn’t register, of course, we could not discuss
this, the different views. . . You know, there’d be a conflict . . . The
authorities expected everyone to register, to comply, and then leave the
camp. But then many of us protested and felt differently, so we had some
conflicts.
RC: Were you resentful?
HK: Of the government, yeah. It was very difficult because I was very
Americanized. And to take that other position was very difficult. That
meant that we were categorized as being disloyal. And, of course, the
others looked down on disloyals . . . there was a lot of distrust.
RC: Do you know approximately how many, or what percentage of the
theatre group were disloyal?
HK: (Laughs) Not many.
RC: So you were one of the minority?
HK: Yes, I was. In the theater group I think I was because those who
were in the theater were pretty assimilated.

Kashiwagi’s recollection that the members of the Little Theatre, by and large,
were not “disloyals” is accurate and he remembers that Sada Murayama in particular
cooperated with the registration process:

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Sada Murayama had problems. She was advocating, you know, telling people to register. People in her block. And I think they did things to her. They wrote things on her door and labeled her “pro-America,” or something like that. There was a lot of that going on. It was terrible.

Jiro Shimoda also cooperated with the order to register:

I did register, “Yes-Yes,” and felt America was my country. I had no desire to go to Japan and I didn’t speak the language. . . I remember the riots and turmoil but those were mostly by the Kibei, those educated in Japan. I could see their point, but I felt there was no way I could make it in Japan and my loyalty was to this country despite the bigots and hysteria that put us in camp. (October 17, 1994)

Morse Saito similarly recalls that “the Little Theatre group were all among the ‘Loyals’ if memory serves,” yet his brother, Perry, was not (at least he would not classified be as such): “Perry was a Yes-No person on loyalty.”

Morse Saito also offers an explanation for the cancellation of the third series as well as a look at the mounting tensions which hastened the demise of the Little Theatre. On two separate occasions he wrote of these tensions:

There were those who wanted an end put to all such “frivolous” stuff (anti-Little Theatre were the No-No bunch whom I learned to hate—and not get over that hate for a dozen years). (March 1995)

After our unpublicized riots of February 1943, the pro-Japan Kibeis tried to stop all such “frivolous” activities of the [R]ec[reation] [D]ept and even threatened to break up Little Theatre performances. It took courage to carry on and the L.T. [Little Theatre] group carried on even after some Christian ministers had been severely beaten up. (April 4, 1995)

The courage that Morse Saito lauds was in part the courage to continue a policy of assimilation through acculturation which made the Little Theatre, in the eyes of the Kibei (among others), “too American.” As Hiroshi Kashiwagi implies, this policy came under question within the theater group itself. Apparently, the embrace of the status quo
became a questionable strategy if the status quo continued to treat the Nisei as something less than citizens. Still, they persevered and one can see the guiding hand of Sada Murayama at work behind the decision to go on. Although only two more series of plays were produced by the Little Theatre, they never deviated from their manifesto—to the disappointment of their audience in many cases.

As for the plays of the third series themselves, very little is known of Garrett Starmer's *Angelpuss*. Starmer himself does not have a ready copy. He recalls that he was invited to produce, cast, and direct his play by Sada Murayama and that the play “definitely was a farce categorically and very light, very much fun.” Starmer's recollection of one particular scene reveals something of Japanese culture that seems to have been handed down from the Issei to the Nisei generation:

> There was a kiss at one point. The theme of the play was “love me, love my dog,” and there was a place on the settee where the hero was to kiss the heroine. I just couldn’t get them to loosen up and do it like a kiss. Finally someone explained to me that in the older Japanese culture, the kiss was... reserved for after marriage. On that scene I could feel—or maybe it’s because I expected it—a little reaction from the audience... there was nothing I could do about it except I accepted a less passionate kiss.

Teenage awkwardness could also explain the hesitancy to kiss, for as Starmer himself admits, his actors “were all, right down to the last one, just absolute American teenage kids.” The settee Starmer mentions was, he recalls, appropriated for the production, although he does not recall where it came from. Everything, as he remembers, was “somewhat makeshift.”

Rachel Crothers' *Peggy* is a rather talky play about members of a family who try to become the sole guardian of Little Dan, the son of a deceased relative. Little Dan has
been living with his stepmother, Peggy, who is not liked by Dan Sr.’s kin. The action of
this sentimental piece takes place in the room of an old house which, although lavishly
described in the text ("The room has never quite let go—never flowed into the abandon of
luxury . . ."), does not play a material role vis a vis the action; the play is successfully
staged on any makeshift living room set. Therefore, it is conceivable that no difficulties
were encountered by the Little Theatre in terms of set design.

The aforementioned review of March 1 devotes itself almost exclusively to

Angelpuss:

COMEDY BY SCHOOL TEACHER MAKES HIT

Playwright Garrett Starmer, instructor of speech at the local high
school, has something to gloat about in his new play, "Angelpuss," which
made its initial bow before an appreciative audience, at the Little Theater,
Feb. 20.

"Angelpuss" is a light homespun comedy with none of the charm
and vitality omitted. The play moved rapidly without a "drag" and kept
the amused audience from indulging in yawn sessions. Although the
members of the drama group had no professional training before, a
surprisingly finished performance was given, a credit to the painstaking
directions of Sada Murayama and Garrett Starmer.

"Angelpuss" will brew and mellow with each performance as the
cast members gain experience before the tour is complete.

Also on the program were "Peggy" and "The Boy Comes Home" which
revealed new faces in the cast. Difficult dialogues hindered the
novice performers who could not overcome their natural handicaps. No
attempt will be made to single out any member of the cast for outstanding
performance but that all of them put warmth and enthusiasm into their
roles.

Unfortunately, no elaboration is offered as to the nature of the "difficult dialogues," nor if
they were a problem in both Peggy and The Boy Comes Home or just one of those plays.

Clearly, Starmer's farce was the favored production and its popularity may also be the
result of Starmer's own popularity among his students. However, if we take this
reviewer’s words as those of the general public, we find the same pattern emerging in each series: light comedies and farces were in demand.

“Along the Firebreak”

In March 1943, the Tulean Dispatch published a separate section, entitled Along the Firebreak. As with other such supplements, this special section included stories, poetry, and a review of camp activities. This particular issue, however, featured a look at the Little Theatre:

Make-up, footlights, cold cream, potato chips... costumes, laughter, wisecracks. Night after night, performance after performance. Different audiences—attentive, appreciative, indifferent, wisecracking, rowdy.

Two weeks before the performance—script, reading, memorizing, rehearsals... Two weeks before rehearsal—reading plays and plays and plays, finally choosing three, mostly comedies, sometimes drama, tragedy, phantasy. Tryouts, casting.

Shouting, screaming, laughing, crying, slapping, “Grrr, how angry I am! I hate you!”... Love and kisses, ecstasy, thrilling heartbeat, “Darling, I love you.” A respectable minister saying, “You fool! Shut up!”

“All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely actors...” Actors in the audience—“I guess he told you!”... “Don’t let us down yet, old man.”... A fur coat—a whistle.

Stage props, setting, make-up, prompting, costume designing.
End of two weeks, last performance... Whew! At last! What a relief! Oh Yeah? Rehearsals for next month begin almost immediately.
Poor Mrs. Murayama—“This is the way to fall.” “Run around excitedly; get on your knees, like this.” “A swing on the left should be delivered this way.” “This is the technique of embracing and kissing a girl.” Boys, here’s your chance to learn. There will be some plays in which eating scenes will occur, also. There is no age or size limit. All kinds of people are needed—little children, grandmothers... pea poles, fatsos. So, if you’re interested in learning the art of a perfect kiss, how to grow old gracefully, the way to connect a right, if you’re hungry, the Little Theater beckons you. (Ellipses in original)
This lighthearted look at behind the scenes of the Little Theatre provides some valuable information as to how the Little Theatre operated. Apparently, plays were chosen over a two-week period, cast, rehearsed over a two-week period, and performed. As the author indicates, the Little Theatre’s initial concern for diversity of genre was replaced by an emphasis on comedy, but future productions will demonstrate that the Little Theatre still attempted to introduce more serious fare to an increasingly uneasy audience. It is not clear who is addressing whom in the dialogue above nor if these lines are paraphrases from plays or part of the rehearsal process; it is unknown who the “respectable minister” is. The dialogue of the final paragraph is clearly attributed to Sada Murayama who seems to have controlled very aspect of the rehearsal process. The indication here is that she possessed knowledge about the theater which the others did not (Hiroshi Kashiwagi, of course, was an exception). Finally, it is apparent that this offering was meant to recruit new participants—primarily performers—to the Little Theatre. The call for performers of any age opens the door to Issei participants (although none ever joined the group), but also demonstrates how different this type of theatre organization was from High School theater where participants were all roughly the same age.

The Fourth Bill: May 10-17, 1943

Some three months passed before the Little Theatre produced a new series of plays. In the interim, the only mention of theater came from the Tri-State High School which announced the formation of a dramatics group, “The Tri-State Thespians” *(Dispatch, April 9, 1943)*. Labeled as the “Little Theatre, Jr.,” the group scheduled a
debut for “the near future,” promising to offer “a combination of mystery and comedy plays, monologues and music.” The troupe was to be directed by Jeanette Smoyer of the Tri-State High School staff.

On May 5, Little Theatre Business Manager Jiro Shimoda announced in the Dispatch plans for a new series of plays. The “May series” (as it was called in the paper) was to include The Valiant, “a tragedy,” and two comedies, Elmer and No Time for Comedy. The latter play was to feature an all-Caucasian cast, including Garrett Starmer and Jeanette Smoyer. It is not known why Caucasians were invited to perform for the Little Theatre nor what Sada Murayama hoped to convey by their inclusion. Given what is known of Mrs. Murayama’s feelings toward assimilation and cooperation with the Caucasian majority, it is entirely plausible to think that a demonstration of solidarity between the Japanese and the Caucasians was her desired goal. Such a demonstration would be especially poignant given recent tensions at the camp (and among the Little Theatre members). Hiroshi Kashiwagi believes that it was not Murayama who invited the Caucasians to perform but the administration itself which took a sudden interest in theater: “I think the administration wanted to be part of the theater. I think they were just interested.” Again, it is not known why the administration wanted to become a part of the all-Nisei Little Theatre, if indeed Kashiwagi is correct in his assumption. Perhaps they too were conscious of the tensions caused by the registration fiasco and shared Sada Murayama’s desire for some kind of on-stage pluralism.

No further announcements of the May series appeared in the Dispatch which is somewhat unusual given the frequent reminders which were often published before a
series would commence. However, there were a number of unusual occurrences
surrounding this bill of plays. The review which appeared in the May 12 issue of the
Dispatch reveals not only a program change, but also a change in audience response:

LITTLE THEATER DRAWS CROWD
Fourth in a series of Little Theater plays was highly acclaimed last
Monday before an S.R.O. crowd. Discarding his usual old man roles, Jiro
Shimoda stole the show as Elmer in the play of the same title by Bernice
Humiston McNeil. The part of Susan was well handled by Bonnie
Nakamura. Niko and Ada Nakagiri, Funi and Tomi Kondo, Nancy Akita,
Jack Sasaki, and Barney Kawada rounded out the cast.

Because of the departure of part of the cast the Caucasian
personnel members presented Thornton Wilder’s “Our Town” instead of
“No Time for Comedy” as scheduled. Living up to his Broadway stage
experience, Garrett Starmer was definitely outstanding in his portrayal of
George. Playing opposite Starmer was Jeanette Smoyer as Emily. Grover
Lyttle enacted the role of the stage manager.

Hit of the evening’s performances was “The Valiant” by
Middlemass and Hall. Trained to replace Yukio Ozaki and Joni Shimoda
on a few days notice, Stanley Sugiyame and Shiro Tokuno expertly played
their parts of Warden Holt and Father Daly respectively. As usual Hiroshi
Kashiwagi brilliantly mastered the role of James Dyke. And the part of
Josephine Paris was magnificently portrayed by versatile Mei Yamasaki.

Announcer for the presentations was director Sada Murayama.
Those helping out were: Kiku Tomita, program; Grace Yamadera,
usherettes; and Marian Ishii, make-up.

The departure of cast members was not yet related to the removal of “loyals”
from Tule Lake; this occurred in September, months after the last production by the Little
Theatre. However, a number of internees (mostly Kibei) who steadfastly refused to
cooperate with the registration process were removed to other locations, some outside of
the state of California. Given the position toward the registration held by most of the
Little Theatre members, it is more likely that they were removed either to join the armed
forces or to pursue other opportunities, usually additional schooling. Perry Saito himself
departed at this time, despite his “Yes-No” response to the loyalty questions. As Morse
Saito relates, "[h]e had become a pacifist and surprisingly they let him out of Tule Lake in May, 1943. He went to work for the Fellowship of Reconciliation (a pacifist organization during World War II) as a race relations mid-west field secretary."

Caucasians departed with some regularity at this time as well--Garrett Starmer, for example, to pursue a job as a magazine editor--with teachers finding other positions or leaving the camp for other reasons. It is unclear from the review just who departed and why (or even if "departed" means left the camp entirely), but given that only the Caucasian production was affected, the departures probably referred to a sudden cut in the high school staff.

Surprisingly, the "hit" of the series, at least according to this reviewer, was not any of the comedies but the "tragedy," *The Valiant* (1920). The play was brought to the attention of Saito and Murayama by Hiroshi Kashiwagi: "I had a copy of that play and I brought it thinking, hoping, that I could play the part . . . I was surprised that they picked it." The play was written by Holworthy Hall and Robert Middlemass and takes place in a Warden's office in a State Prison, "a large, cold, unfriendly apartment, with bare floors and staring, whitewashed walls" (3). As such, the set posed no problem for the stage at Barrack 408. The action focuses upon the courage of one man, known as James Dyke (his real identity is never revealed), facing execution for murder. The audience is invited to respect Dyke for his fearlessness and inner strength as he is led off to be hanged, quoting Shakespeare's famous lines about the valiant from *Julius Caesar* as he departs. As with *Ile*, the similarities between the desperate situation of the characters and the realities of internment camp existence may have been obvious to those in attendance;
they may certainly have been apparent to Kashiwagi who was quite outspoken about his condemnation of the injustices at camp.

But the fact that *The Valiant* was the “hit” of the series suggests that more than desperation registered in the minds of the spectators. Dyke’s bravery may have been seen as inspiring, and given the courage required to continue the Little Theatre that Morse Saito describes, a bit of the valiant may have been needed by the performers as well. Consider the words of internee Mas Yamasaki who, after 50 years, remembered *The Valiant* vividly: “Being in incarceration by our government, I felt very close to the life of the main character. Through his words I was inspired and [this] strengthened hope for my life—which was at that time insecure and limited, to say the least” (December 4, 1994). It is of course not known if Yamasaki’s words—and their recognition of both the realities of camp life and the hope for a better life—were typical of the spectators as a whole.

All that is known of the all-Caucasian version of *Our Town* is that only a few excerpts were offered. Hiroshi Kashiwagi recalls that the excerpts took up “maybe half of one of ours—fifteen minutes.” As for the scene or scenes presented, Kashiwagi believes the scene where George and Emily go to the malt shop—“that short scene that’s always done”—was presented featuring Jeanette Smoyer and Garrett Starmer. Unfortunately, no playbill for this production has been found either to corroborate Kashiwagi’s recollection or to add to it. Also unknown is the response to the production. The quintessential American play performed by Caucasians certainly would not have the same impact, particularly in light of the issue of assimilation, if performed by Japanese
(as it was, in its entirety, at Topaz). The novelty of seeing two well-liked high school
teachers onstage may have overshadowed any thematic concerns the play may possibly
induce.

Beatrice Humiston McNeil’s *Elmer* features a smart-tongued young boy of 14, the
only son in a family of teenage girls: Jeanie and Janie, 17-year-old twins and Susan, 16.
The plot involves a beautiful evening coat sent to Susan by her out-of-town father. Janie
begs her mother to let her wear the coat on her date with Hubert, and despite
protestations from Susan (“But mother, my first new thing!”), is allowed to wear the coat.
Janie soon declares that the coat has been stolen and Elmer, with gun in hand, leads the
investigation, scaring everyone as he suddenly appears behind doors, looking for the
burglar. Janie finally must go on her date without Susan’s coat, but after she departs
Elmer reveals that he has hidden the coat under his bathrobe, announcing poignantly, “I
did it for Susan! . . . I was just sick and tired of seein’ Susie play Cinderella with those
two wicked sisters!”

Elmer’s wisecracking insults at his sisters’ expense must have kept the young
Nisei spectators quite entertained, particularly those with siblings. Jiro Shimoda, who
played Elmer, recalls the general response to the play:

> The young people seemed to really enjoy the comedies, “Elmer,” and
> “Elmer and the Lovebug” [produced in the next series of plays]. I had the
title role and was known as Elmer for many years. Being all amateurs, it
was a lot of fun and provided an outlet for many as actors and actresses.
(November 22, 1994)

However, the play indirectly addresses another Japanese generational concern,
exacerbated by the internment experience. Prior to the internments, the Japanese family
structure was codified with a father/husband breadwinner. After the internment, males no longer enjoyed a position as family breadwinner since women and teenage children were encouraged to work and were paid similar wages to adult males. Harry H.L. Kitano argues that the evacuation “tended toward the destruction of established family patterns of behavior” (77). In addition, the political power given to Nisei at the camps and taken away from Issei elevated the younger generation to an unprecedented level of autonomy and this situation was often reflected in High School drama where plays about teenagers making adult decisions were featured. The diminished parental role, particularly of the father, as well as the elevation of the younger generation as family leaders, is reflected in *Elmer* where the father figure is absent and the mother, although an onstage character, is unseen for most of the action. Clearly the role of “head of the household” is given to Elmer who takes it upon himself to protect his family and to offer assistance to Susan whom he feels has been given second-class status by their parents. Such a presentation marks the first time that a play featuring teenage heroics—which subtly paralleled the generational upheaval caused by the internments—was produced by the Tule Lake Little Theatre.

**The Final Bill: July 19-23, 1943**

Mounting tensions and social unrest forced the Little Theatre to cease operations after the July series. Although camp life was somewhat calmer at this time, the backlash from the registration fiasco still festered as plans were made to remove all “loyal” internees. Of concern also was what to do with the “disloyal” population which,
although disproportionately larger at Tule Lake, was found to some degree at all camps. On July 15 Tule Lake was selected as the site for resegregation, that is, it was decided that Tule Lake would house “disloyals” from all camps. In preparation for this new role for Tule Lake, the camp began to undergo physical changes such as the “security” measures mentioned earlier. The Little Theatre attempted one last series of one-act plays at this time.

Prior to this series, an announcement about the upcoming efforts of the newly-formed Tri-State High Thespians was published in the Dispatch. The June 5 issue notes the presentation of two one-acts to be offered on June 7: Love in Bloom, labeled a “comedy,” and Two Crooks and a Lady, a “melodrama.” Also on the bill were a “Negro dialogue” and musical numbers. No review was ever offered for these presentations and it is not known if they were indeed performed. The fact that no review was forthcoming from the receptive and supportive Dispatch staff suggests, at the very least, that something was amiss at Tule Lake. Also before the Little Theatre presentations was another all-Caucasian offering entitled “Faculty Follies.” The Dispatch of July 9 reported that Jeanette Smoyer danced and an “epic drama,” Lighthouse Keeper’s Daughter, was presented. Nothing else is known of this performance.

The only mention of the July series in the Dispatch appeared on July 15:

LITTLE THEATER OPENS JULY 19

The July series of the Little Theater productions will begin its run on Monday, July 19, at 408 from 8 p.m.

Plays to be presented are: (1) “Enter the Hero”—a comedy; (2) “Baccaccio’s [sic] Untold Tale”—a tragedy; and (3) “Elmer and the Lovebug”—a comedy (sequel to “Elmer,” only one year later).

Performances are scheduled for the respective wards as follows: Ward 1—July 19, Ward 2—July 20, Wards 3 and 4—July 21, Wards 5 and 200
Although the Little Theatre appeared headed toward the resumption of more regularly scheduled (i.e. monthly) offerings, the fact is that changes both at camp and within the Little Theatre itself signaled the demise of the group. Performances now took place over the course of fewer days with some wards sharing the same performance date. This is probably due to a perceived lack of interest in the productions, leading to dwindling attendance. Such a problem may have begun months earlier; Garrett Starmer recalls an audience of approximately 30 to 40 for Angelpuss. If true, the Little Theatre was only filling 30-40% of its seating capacity, thought to be about 100. This would be bad enough if economics were the chief concern of the Little Theatre, but Sada Murayama’s added goal of assimilation through acculturation could not succeed if only a handful--of the handful attending theater in the first place--frequented the shows.

As noted in the Dispatch announcement, previews for the administration were cancelled, and growing hostility toward the administration was probably the reason. According to Hiroshi Kashiwagi, the Little Theatre began to be perceived as “too American”: “We were acting the part of Americans . . . but we were, you know, being Asian.” Ironically, that which brought spectators like Mas Yamasaki to the theater, the novelty of seeing Asians in “non-traditional” roles, was precisely what led to theater’s downfall within its own Asian community. Yamasaki describes why he attended most plays of the Little Theatre:

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In my mind, the Little Theatre performers were a totally new experience. I went to see the plays mostly to see the niseis performing a variety of roles (rather than only subservient ones we so often see in the movies)—especially to see nisei actors performing roles that I had never seen before done by niseis. It was something I never even dreamed or imagined possible. In our early days we saw Warner Orland [sic] or Sidney Toiler portray Charlie Chan and Peter Lore [sic] playing Mr. Moto. Therefore, it was not only entertaining but was also a great novelty seeing niseis portraying all the roles. (December 4, 1994)

It is not known if the feelings expressed by Yamasaki were of concern to Murayama and her Little Theatre, although they probably were a part of the consciousness of any Japanese American who ever ventured in the movie houses or the theater; as Yamasaki goes on to report,

I recall meeting actor George Takei, who played Sulu in “Star Trek.” He said that he used to play the role of Superman when he was young and used to swing in the trees during the summers that he spent in Florin (country town near Sacramento). I guess he had similar dreams, or imagination, as so many other youngsters had. (December 4, 1994)

The demise of the Little Theatre therefore pulled the plug on the visualization of Asians acting the roles generally reserved for the Caucasian mainstream. Japanese forces against assimilation were successful in putting an end to the “American” Little Theatre. For this reason, among others, the Little Theatre could not survive in the Tule Lake Segregation Center as it did in the Tule Lake Relocation Center.

Of the plays chosen for what would be the final bill, two appear in the aforementioned Fifty Contemporary One-Act Plays: Enter the Hero and Boccaccio’s Untold Tale. Theresa Helburn’s Enter the Hero (1916) takes place in a sitting room where two sisters, Ruth and Anne Carey, discuss Anne’s engagement to Harold Lawson. Anne’s dream—and apparently the town’s as well—is her marriage to Harold, but through
her conversation with Harold, who arrives suddenly while on leave from one of his many business trips overseas, we learn that this courtship was completely fabricated by her. Harold expresses little romantic interest in Anne and is appalled when she presents letters (which she has written herself) and a ring that he supposedly gave to her. The play ends with an exasperated Harold departing and Anne about ready to burn the letters. However, we last see her busily writing another letter “from Harold” as the curtain falls.

Although the play is labeled a comedy, both in the text and by the Little Theatre itself, Anne and her false hopes for marriage lend an almost pathetic air to the proceedings. Her attempts to convince herself (and everyone else) of Harold’s devotion may have been played for laughs by the Little Theatre, but it may just as easily be played with a more serious intent. As Anne tells her sister, “We must have some one to dream about—to talk about. I suppose it’s because we haven’t enough to do” (390); it is unknown if such a line, and the actions accompanying it, were perceived by the spectators as apropos for their often boring existence. Perhaps theater was the dream these spectators encountered as they searched for something to do; the play’s title certainly serves as a reminder of the theatricality of life.

*Boccaccio’s Untold Tale* (1920), by Harry Kemp, is a period piece, taking place in Florence in 1348, “The Year of the Great Plague.” The scene is a room in the house of Florio, a poet in love with Olivia who is stricken with the plague. Violante, a jilted lover of Florio, insists on seeing Florio but is told that he will look upon no woman until he sees his beloved Olivia, alive or dead. Olivia returns veiled, but the plague has not spoiled her beauty. As a test of his true devotion, Violante tells Florio that Olivia has
been disfigured; Violante wishes to see if Florio really loves Olivia or merely worships her beauty. When Florio does come out he has blinded himself. He realizes he has been deceived ("What have you women done to me!") and the despairing Florio pushes Olivia away. As she takes his head to her bosom, Violante shows signs of succumbing to the plague.

Hiroshi Kashiwagi admits some confusion with this play: "It's a bad play. I didn't know what was going on." George Katagiri, who played the role of Dioneo, a member of Boccaccio's party who stumbles upon the horrific scene as the play ends, remembers something more about Boccaccio:

I don't recall what role I was playing, but I remember a gory scene where someone gouges out his eyes because he is led to believe that his love has been disfigured from the black plague that was sweeping through Europe at the time. The tragedy was that his love was not disfigured but wanted to test his love for her, so she led him to believe that she was to see if he would still love her. This was a very impressive scene for me to remember all these years. (September 22, 1994)

Katagiri's memory of a "gory scene" may indicate an emendation to the script by the Little Theatre. Kemp's script, as reproduced in Fifty Contemporary One-Act Plays, does not include an on-stage eye-gouging scene; rather, Florio enters already blinded, the deed having been done off stage. Katagiri later revised his recollection:

As I remember, the scene was not bloody. The actor [Hiroshi Kashiwagi] contorted in a way that suggested that he gouged out his own eye. I remember a gastly [sic] moan. By this time the "eye" is exposed and appears almost black in color. (October 3, 1994)
If this recollection is correct, then the scene was played as written. However, Katagiri's description of a blackened eye may provide some insights into the makeup used to create the effect of an eye-gouging.

Although no review of this series ever appeared in the Dispatch, the Little Theatre had another outlet for gauging audience response to the plays chosen. A set of audience response sheets for this particular bill exists. It is not known if others exist or if this technique was used during any of the previous bills. The sheets themselves are approximately 4" x 5" headed by the title "Choices." Three lines labeled "1st.," "2nd.," and "3rd." give the spectator room to pencil in his or her ranking of the three plays presented. A section labeled "Comments and Suggestions" followed by eleven lines provided space for commentary. The responses in this section reveal some unsurprising comments given the general feeling toward the plays as indicated in Dispatch reviews.

The six sheets that I am in possession of include the following information:

A. 1st. ELMER AND THE LOVEBUG  
   2nd. BOCCACCIO'S UNTOLD TALE  
   3rd. ENTER THE HERO [the "Rd." of "3rd." was crossed out and the words "LAST CHOICE" written in]  
   Comments: ENTER THE HERO IN MY OPINION WAS LOSS [sic] AND THE WORST I EVER SEEN AT THE LITTLE THEATER. ELMER WAS SUPERB. MORE PLEASE.

B. 1st. ELMER AND LOVE BUG  
   2nd. BOCCACCIO  
   3rd. ENTER THE HERO  
   Comments: ELMER WAS SUPERB! LOTS OF FUN. MORE ELMER PLEASE. "ENTER THE HERO" WAS LOUSY. ALSO VERY MUCH OVERACTED.

C. 1st. BOCCACCIO'S UNTOLD TALE  
   2nd. ENTER THE HERO  
   3rd. ELMER AND THE LOVEBUG

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Comments: I WOULD LIKE TO SEE MORE OF ELMER’S PLAY PUT ON. I THINK IT IS VERY GOOD AND SHOWS A FAMILY LIFE WHICH MANY OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCE. BOCCACCIO’S UNTOLD TALE AND SUCH HISTORIC PLAYS HAVE BEEN MY MOST INTEREST TYPE.

D. 1st. ELMER AND THE LOVE BUG
   2nd. ENTER THE HERO
   3rd. BOCCACCIO’S UNTOLD TALE
   Comments: MORE ELMER AND THE LOVE BUG.

E. 1st. ELMER AND THE LOVE BUG
   2nd. BOCCACCIO’S UNTOLD TALE
   3rd. THE OTHER ONE
   Comments: HOW ABOUT MORE OF ELMER?

F. 1st. ELMER AND THE LOVE BUG
   2nd. BOCCACCIO’S UNTOLD TALE
   3rd. ENTER THE HERO
   Comments: [None offered]

Clearly, *Elmer and the Love Bug*, the light-hearted sequel to the previously produced *Elmer*, was vastly preferred over the other plays. Even the opinion expressed in “C” above shows a preference for *Elmer and the Lovebug* despite the fact that the play was ranked third by this spectator. Response “C” also suggests that it was written by an older member of the audience, probably one of the few Issei present; the unpolished prose is indicative of less familiarity with idiomatic English. It is, of course, possible that *Elmer and the Love Bug* was the best performed piece (it is probably the easiest to handle in terms of performance) which added to its overall enjoyment by the audience, but it is unmistakable that audiences craved comedies and went to the theater seeking escapism through laughter. It seems that only the last item of the Little Theatre’s August 1942 manifesto—“To serve as an escape from reality”—was successful, despite the efforts of Sada Murayama.
The Tule Lake Little Theatre ceased operations after the two special performances of their July bill, on July 26 and 27. An announcement printed in the Dispatch on July 26 reminded those interested that “no tickets will be sold previously.” In addition, “servicemen are admitted free of charge.” By this time Tule Lake was undergoing its transformation from Relocation Center to Segregation Center. The first phase began with the expulsion of “loyals” from Tule Lake and to one of the remaining nine camps. However, before this process, the Army recruited “loyal” young adult males to serve in uniform and at each camp the servicemen were given a hero’s sendoff. The Little Theatre did its part by treating these men to an evening of theater.

After the Little Theatre

Not only did theater cease to exist at Tule Lake once the program of segregation was in place, the Tulean Dispatch also closed down; September 9, 1943 was its last issue. As Hiroshi Kashiwagi recalls, “there was a period there where there was no paper.” This “period” seems to have been approximately six months, from early September 1943 until March 1944, when the “Official Publication of the Tule Lake Center,” the Newell Star, premiered. The Star was not nearly as supportive of the few theatrical efforts undertaken by Nisei as the Dispatch was. Instead, the paper dutifully announced theatrical events but offered no post-event reviews. In this regard, the Star resembled newspapers at every other camp. Ironically, in terms of theater, when Tule Lake was merely one of ten Relocation Centers its paper distinguished itself as a supporter of the arts; once Tule Lake
became the only Segregation Center in existence, its paper became indistinguishable from those at other camps.

As was the case at every camp when nascent theater groups formed, an announcement appeared in the April 6, 1944 issue of the Star:

All interested in dramatics and desiring to act in the Little Theater are asked to register at 901-B.

Two one-act plays, "[T]wo Bachelors" and "Himeko's Ghost" and a musical play, "Cavalcade of Japanese in America," will be produced in the near future, announced the Drama Dept.

A similar announcement was printed on April 27, informing readers of a meeting of drama and speech classes.

On May 4, the following appeared:

The CA [Community Affairs] drama and speech class will hold an important meeting Saturday from 1 to 3 PM in room 6-D, high school building.

All those who registered for this class are asked to attend by 1PM. People interested in the Little Theater are welcome, according to Wilfred Horiuchi, director of the CA Drama Dept.

Wilfred Horiuchi is a familiar name to camp theater; he is the same man who directed plays and taught speech and drama at Poston, contributing as well to the writing of the unproduced Postonese. Apparently, Horiuchi was sent to Tule Lake in September 1943 after being classified as a "disloyal" at Poston--one of only 6% to do so at that camp (Thomas and Nishimoto 62). Also now at Tule Lake was Ray Muramoto who provided the voice of "Kato" in the Mutual Broadcasting System's popular radio drama, The Green Hornet, as well as being a sound technician for The Lone Ranger radio show. At Tule Lake Muramoto directed a Radio Drama Division which was added to the Community Activities section.
When Muramoto’s radio club presented a broadcast, however, Wilfred Horiuchi was at the helm:

RADIO AMATEURS TO GIVE MOCK BROADCAST SATURDAY
A special radio program, “Tule Radio Playhouse Show,” will be on the “air lanes” at 1 p.m. this Saturday at the 1008-A studios, announced Wilfred Horiuchi, director of dramatics. This mock radio broadcast is being presented to give persons practical experience in the radio field as artists, announcers, commentators and sound effects technicians, he said. No experience is necessary.

“Tule Radio Playhouse Show,” directed by Horiuchi, will consist of four one-act radio plays, songs, and tap dances.

Horiuchi was formerly a Hollywood stage-screen-radio featured player. On the screen, he played the role of “Dr. Hata” in Warner Brothers’ Production “Magic Bullet.” He was affiliated with the “Rise and Shine” program (KHJ), “Happy Go Lucky Hour” (CBS), “House Party Variety Show” (MBS), and numerous other radio programs. (Feb. 8, 1945)

Unfortunately, nothing else is known of this production except that it was repeated on March 21 before a live audience. Tickets to the event were offered at no charge.

Other than the aforementioned productions, all other theater at Tule Lake was presented by Issei. Talent and variety shows continued but the emphasis was on traditional Japanese songs, dances, and music. During the registration process, 42% of Issei males gave non-affirmative replies to the loyalty questions and so remained at Tule Lake when it became a Segregation Center. Although the Issei still enjoyed little political power after segregation--political leaders after September 1943 were mostly Kibei--there appears to have been a resurgence in Japanese culture at Tule Lake. Issei theater, which was present at all camps, rose to the forefront at the camp, as did many other forms of traditional Japanese culture. In an article detailing the folk practices of the Japanese at Tule Lake, Marvin K. Opler contends that Japanese folklore was “part of a
total nativistic reaction from 1944 to 1946" (385), a reaction shared by Issei and Nisei
“when it was deemed important to strike back at administrative pressures, programs, and
policies with the dignified weapons of Japanese culture” (387). Thus with the rejection
of what Opler calls “the American scene,” Tule Lake became more “Japanese,” even
among the Nisei. Western theater really had no place in the nativistic Segregation
Center.

Theater may also have lost its role at Tule Lake because of the tensions at the
camp. As noted before, tensions between the Japanese and Caucasians, as well as among
the Japanese themselves (Issei, Nisei, and Kibei), were present at every camp. The
Tulean response to the registration program certainly heightened tensions. But the
decision to make Tule Lake the lone Segregation Center prepared the way not only for
almost daily disruptions of everyday life, but at times for some life-threatening, violent
episodes. In November 1943 Martial Law was declared in an attempt to stem the rising
tide of violence that plagued the camp. Thus, at the time the Little Theatre was
performing what would be its last series, conditions at the camp had gone from bad to
worse rather quickly as colonist uprisings transformed Tule Lake from a bleak camp
plagued by boredom to a volatile war zone where day-to-day survival became
questionable.

While comparisons between the relocation camps and the Nazi death camps are
generally inappropriate, discussions of survival techniques by Holocaust victims do shed
some light as to why theater became a cultural ornamentation at Tule Lake. In The
Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps, Terrence Des Pres posits a theory I
believe applicable to the situation at Tule Lake: "when men and women must face
months and years of death-threat they endure less through cultural than through
biological imperatives" (vii). Des Pres means, I believe, that survival—that is, existence
at the most basic human level (enough food to get through the day, a place to be
protected from the elements) — becomes the only priority when death threatens. Other
forms of subsistence/coping, particularly those related to a specific culture (a religion, for
instance) or those involving the arts, do not fulfill the immediate requirements for basic
individual survival. Poetry, for example, was written in all the relocation camps and at
the Nazi camps, as well. In Bearing the Unbearable (1990) Frieda W. Aaron explains
that concentration camp poets “created poetry less as a means of self-expression than as
succor, a vehicle of mitigating daily disasters” (3). Of course, theater is a much more
social artform than poetry and theater at Tule Lake aimed to produce group effects,
namely group survival. When the camp became violent, group survival became less
important than individual survival on the most basic level. Granted, the atrocities of
Auschwitz do not equate even remotely to the conditions at Tule Lake, nor was the
systematic destruction of a people undertaken by the WRA. However, the threat of
violence and death was still present at Tule Lake and I believe that this fact allows us to
consider Des Pres’ hypothesis. Thus, by August 1943, the Nisei could no longer afford
the cultural imperative that theater used to be at Tule Lake—even when life became more
stable and the Nisei were busy organizing committees to address the problems of
broken-down plumbing and an inadequate food supply (Thomas and Nishimoto 119)—
and were unable to return to that state of artistic affairs by the time the camp closed its
doors on March 20, 1946.
NOTES

1. The Chekhov play is commonly known as *The Bear*. However, *Fifty Contemporary One-Act Plays* uses the title *The Boor*, and the Little Theatre (whom I believe had a copy of this text) did so, as well. Therefore, all references to the play in this study will use the title *The Boor*. The name of the playwright, however, will be spelled “Chekhov,” despite the spelling in *Fifty Contemporary One-Act Plays* (“Tchekoff”).


CHAPTER 8
THEORIZING NISEI THEATER

Few rituals are as memorable, or as trying, for a young Jewish boy than his Bar Mitzvah, the *rite de passage* at age 13. Today’s Bar Mitzvahs seem divided into two distinct events: the synagogue service where the young man reads from the Torah, and the celebration where dancing, singing, and game-playing are the order of the day. Given the amount of training involved for such an event it is understandable that the honoree would enjoy a lavish celebration. But, gone are the days when a fountain pen and hand shakes were all a Bar Mitzvah boy could look forward to (or expect).

A Bar Mitzvah has of late become more memorable for its celebration (i.e. secular) portion than for the religious service which precedes it. With the exception of those in the most orthodox Jewish families, some Bar Mitzvahs have become either showcases for wealth—a “can you top this” sort of extravaganza— or farcical events of theatrical proportions. I have heard of Bar Mitzvah reception “themes,” such as a Las Vegas night complete with slot machines, roulette wheels, and poker chips, or a Chinese theme where the Bar Mitzvah boy was escorted into the dining hall on a rickshaw. Instead of a fountain pen, one young man received a motorcycle. At such spectacles, the ritualistic aspect of the occasion has been overshadowed by the demonstrations of wealth to the extent that, from the perspective of the participants, ritual has all but disappeared.
The ritual has become the rationale for the event—the reason to gather—but the
celebration is now the event. From this conception, the occasion of a Bar Mitzvah now
connotes, first and foremost, a celebration.

Victor Turner would label an occasion like a Bar Mitzvah a liminal phenomenon,
but his definition might best be limited to the religious portion of the event. Turner
defines liminality as that which exists in a type of social limbo, a state of seclusion, an
obligatory transition period. By this definition, the Bar Mitzvah boy, as he reads from
the Torah, briefly inhabits a liminal world wherein he is obliged to be neither man nor
boy, but something in-between. It is these “in-between” periods which have given
Turner (and others) cause for concern in the attempt to explore the complex relationship
between ritual and everyday life, particularly where and when they meet. The
demarcation between the religious ceremony and the celebration are paradigmatic of such
a relationship. The trends in Bar Mitzvahs described above suggest that ritual is
displaced (in the memory of the spectators, if nowhere else) in favor of something “non-
ritual.” In the case of a contemporary Bar Mitzvah, the celebration portion, while
arguably not ritual-based, is also not “everyday life” if we think of the “everyday” as the
“workaday world.” Clearly, the partying is a social diversion, a leisure activity, and
liminoid by Turner’s definition: an optional “break” from the workaday world which
resembles the liminal but is not identical to it. Thus, from Turner’s perspective, the
reading of the Torah is liminal, the party afterwards liminoid.

Interestingly, the party has also been somewhat ritualized to include such staples
as the candle lighting ceremony, dancing, and the ordered meal. What, then, is the
difference between these ritualized events? In a synagogue, in the presence of the eternal flame and holy scripture, the religious-based Bar Mitzvah ritual truly inhabits an “in-between” world which ushers in the evolution from boy to man. It must always be liminal since it serves a greater cultural purpose: to allow into the culture a new member whose very presence sustains that culture; this ritual is obligatory if the culture is to survive. The celebration, however, housed in a context of loud music, bright lights, and culinary delights—the stuff meant to please earthly senses—must always be liminoid as it seems to serve a less compelling cultural purpose. Perhaps, then, it is the context which determines the liminality of a cultural event.

As Las Vegas nights and Chinese themes demonstrate, the liminoid Bar Mitzvah celebration and theater are not far removed from one another and what was once a solemn rite de passage can be seen as a theatrical event. Bar Mitzvah parties which tend to “show off” (usually wealth) take on aspects of performance (dancing, games, decorations, bright lights, etc.), with invited guests—those who witnessed the liminal ritual as congregants—now taking on the role of audience/participants. The Bar Mitzvah allows its congregation to involve themselves dually as both witnesses and participants, walking the invisible line between ritual and theater. In terms of the Bar Mitzvah, then, where does ritual end and theater begin? Furthermore, where does any cultural event demarcate ritual and theater, and what is the role of its participants in either scenario? In the aptly titled From Ritual to Theatre (1982), Victor Turner proposes an answer. Turner argues that theater evolved out of ritual, either as “an exaggeration of . . . ritual processes” (12) or “the cultural debris of some forgotten liminal ritual” (55). Either
suggestion illuminates our understanding of the aforementioned Bar Mitzvah celebrations: the partying surely exaggerates the celebratory aspects of the occasion while the liminal ritual itself remains all but forgotten. We are left with something we may label “theater” which to us (“us” here meaning post-industrial revolution, democratic-liberal society) is a diversion—a leisurely break from the everyday, distinctly separate from our work.

It is tempting to view internment camp theater in this way—as a leisurely diversion from the everyday experience of camp life, as something the internees did when they weren’t working. However, from both the perspective of the Caucasian administration and the Japanese themselves, theater was a great deal more complex and served a larger cultural purpose, although which culture must first be determined. For the administration, the culture seems to have been loosely defined as “American” culture, a multicultural “melting pot” of equality, individual choice, and protection under the Constitution. This is surely the definition of culture pursued by the Japanese Americans, however the context of the internment camps forced them first to define their own Nisei culture, to correct any cultural shortcomings (such as unacculturation in the arts), and then to attempt to assimilate. Both the administration and the Nisei seemed to have pursued similar goals as far as serving a larger cultural purpose is concerned. The Nisei, though, needed to work through one particular culture before it could embrace another.

Context, then, becomes a central concern in this discussion; we must always be aware that the various contexts of the internment camp experience, which led to a number of different perspectives on camp theater, are those which define the purpose and efficacy
of any theatrical effort undertaken at the camps. The point of view toward camp theater taken by the WRA—within the context of their educational system—differs markedly from that taken by the internees—within the context of their internment—and within the internee population itself, perspectives differ. As I have tried to show in previous chapters, assimilation became a catch-word for the WRA which designed camp life as a means to facilitate the integration of the internees into the American mainstream. Theater groups were therefore organized at the high school level so the Nisei could participate in the American system of community and cooperative organization, but the emphasis always remained on theater as an extracurricular diversion. In terms of Barrack theater, it was the Japanese theater organizers themselves who took the initiative and used theater as a tool to achieve assimilation through acculturation, specifically through works of art. The Tule Lake Little Theatre’s manifesto of August 1942 demonstrated a belief that theater was diversionary only in part; of greater importance to the Little Theatre was its function as conveyors of exclusively Western dramatic art. At Tule Lake, theater for the organizers of the Little Theatre was both diversionary and ritualistic, skewing the boundaries between work and play since it was leisurely and (to them) obligatory at the same time. Ultimately, Nisei Barrack theater organizers sought to position theater, and the benefits one might derive from it, within the everyday world with the expectation that re-entry into that world was to become a reality. The effectiveness of their efforts can best be judged by the spectators whose perspective I at present know only in part. It appears as though spectators attended plays for diversionary reasons—seeking entertainment and relief from both work and the realities of existence at
the relocation camps. These various and varying perspectives, determined by the contexts which create them, leaves a theater phenomenon which in total exists "between" leisure and work; the extent to which theater crosses either boundary depends therefore on the context one considers. And, when the appropriate context has been determined, the decision can be made as to the nature of the "in-between" world that Nisei theater inhabits. I have turned to cultural theory—and issues of liminality—to clarify this position.

Unfortunately, the camps twist, debunk, and regulate theory at every turn, molding theory to conform to them, rarely conforming themselves to it. As a result, any theory of relocation camp theater will have to be unique to the specifics of the camps themselves and the social/cultural/political conditions which led to their creation. It is important to point out that camp theater tends to resist neat definitions. In general, the camps tend to defy any sort of standard categorization, whether we talk of culture, ethnicity, or historical precedence. In terms of theater, they force us to re-examine the way we use words such as "performance," "ritual," "theater," and "culture," not so we may redefine these words, but merely so we may expand their definitions to make room for the unique and unprecedented incarceration of citizens.

In this study I have attempted to classify internment camp theater as High School and Barrack theater. While both provide the means by which to formulate a performance theory for the camps, it will be Barrack theater which most closely follows the hypotheses argued for in this discussion. Because it was the epitome of Barrack theater, Tule Lake will serve as the camp of reference in most instances. Therefore, unless
otherwise indicated, “theater” will refer to the Barrack variety and “camp” will usually mean Tule Lake. Such distinctions shed light on my own bias that High School theater, while interesting, lacked the artistic and social urgency to distinguish it from similar types of theater such as community theater or the high school productions which continue today. On the other hand, Barrack theater as a genre has not been duplicated nor was it a duplication of any type of theater known previously. This is solely because of its context: an internment camp, the temporary incarceration of citizens at a particular moment in history wherein theater was something in between cultural necessity and escapism.

If informed by the perspective of a Nisei Barrack theater organizer, Turner might define camp theater as liminal for the same reason he would the reading of the Torah at a Bar Mitzvah: because it exists “between” leisure and work and is often indistinguishable from either. Also, it is undertaken in order to perpetuate the culture—to strengthen it by re-introducing a member(s) in a new form. According to Turner, we might expect to find such an “in-between” phenomenon in tribal societies. Turner observes, “In the liminal phases and states of tribal and agrarian cultures—in ritual, myth, and legal processes—work and play are hardly distinguishable in many cases” (34). This seems to have been operational at the camps, as well. As one Nisei put it, “the fact that we cannot draw a definite line between our working and non-working hours has a tremendous psychological effect” (qtd. in O’Brien 49). I believe that Barrack theater organizers were aware of this psychological effect and attempted to place theater in this “in-between” world of neither pure leisure nor pure work, thus allowing theater to retain a liminality
otherwise lost in less oppressive contexts. For this reason (among others), I believe that camp theater was indeed liminal, but this liminality is further characterized by its surface secularity and its movement toward the liminoid. I have labeled this new look at Turner’s work Transitional Liminality and have applied it to the phenomenon of camp theater.

**Barrack Theater and Transitional Liminality**

After careful study of the available information on camp theater, I have determined that it is more liminal than liminoid, a statement which, if true, does not debunk Turner but rather expands his definition in light of a unique situation. I believe that camp theater became obligatory in the minds of its organizers due to the conditions of confinement, not merely as a way to combat boredom or as some form of coping mechanism, but as a matter of individual and/or group re-definition. Taking seriatim Turner’s criteria (54-55) for liminal and liminoid, and applying each to camp theater, will develop my view further and additionally lay the groundwork for my extension of liminality.

Turner posits that liminal phenomena predominate in tribal and early agrarian societies. He contrasts this description with the liminoidal post-industrial revolution, nascent capitalist states of Western Europe; “managerial” societies which enjoy universal suffrage, political parties, and separation of church and state, such as the United States; or even centralized state collectives such as the former Eastern-bloc countries. It is apparent that the camps were post-industrial and not particularly agrarian, if one takes
Turner's "agrarian" to mean people whose rituals are associated with agricultural events such as the harvest. The camps were run as a highly centralized society with the WRA overseeing the community-building which became the central purpose of camp life (particularly when the military necessity of the internments was shown to be invalid). But the camps were also quite tribal if we are willing to substitute "ethnic" for "tribal." Harry H.L. Kitano explains that the ethnic community was vital for the existence of the Japanese in America: "the hostility, discrimination, and prejudice with which the Japanese were faced did much to foster internal cohesion" (67). However, Kitano reminds us the Japanese paid a price for such ethnic cohesion: "limited participation and understanding of the larger community" (54). Thus, the Japanese in America—both Issei and Nisei—were ensconced in their own ethnic enclaves (such as the "Japantowns" of the West Coast) into which they were forced to go and from which they dared not leave. Through social policy an ethnic tribalism was created; official government policy (i.e. the internments) merely intensified what the Japanese themselves were forced to institute.

Furthermore, the type of ethnic tribalism found in the camps differed from that found prior to the internments. Before the evacuation, Japanese ethnic communities were controlled by Issei, usually those who could offer financial security to others. Agriculture employed the greatest number of Japanese, and as Harry Kitano explains, "[m]any began to work their own land, either as tenants or purchasers. The unity and cohesion of the group enabled them to pool money and resources" (18). Those employed in small shops and businesses were in a stronger position to control group cohesion:

A Japanese businessman starting out would always have at least a few Japanese customers. This form of cooperation eventually led to more
sophisticated forms, such as the pooling of capital for investment. People from the same ken, or Japanese state, often cooperated in various ways and this was noticeable in particular trades. (21)

Kitano goes on to describe an Issei-run business which employed Japanese only. The cohesion among the workers paralleled that of a typical family, creating for the workers "a sense of identity, belonging, security, and comfort" (22). All of this changed during the internments. The Issei no longer owned businesses—indeed, most lost their assets in their haste to comply with the evacuation orders—and thus were in no financial position to dominate life in the Japanese community. The Caucasian WRA controlled the relocation camps and in turn allocated power to the Nisei, who by sheer numbers alone dominated these new ethnic enclaves. The WRA also believed that their "assimilation" policy could best be implemented through the young Nisei who were, after all, American citizens. Who better to promote assimilation into the American mainstream than youthful American citizens? Certainly not the aged alien Issei generation. Therefore, Nisei theater was developed by the leaders of a new tribalism who utilized theater as a liminal practice.

Given this set of circumstances, Nisei theater retains its liminality precisely because it occupies a transitional place between mainstream America and Nisei culture. In the case of Barrack theater, the Nisei first needed to address its general acculturation problem, and the only way to do so by exposure to the art of the theater. Then and only then could an overture be made to the dominant culture, and the process of assimilation eased. Nisei theater served to diminish the ethnic tribalism of the Issei—a process already undertaken by the WRA—and its efforts placed it squarely in between the old tribalism
which no longer could ensure group survival, and the new mainstream tribalism which promised to incorporate all into the melting pot. However, such efforts were not entirely successful (for reasons which differed at every camp) and Nisei theater remained largely liminal.

Liminoid phenomena, argues Turner, are individual products with collective effects. They are not cyclical; neither are they generated apart from work settings. Liminal phenomena, by contrast, concern themselves with “rhythms,” be they calendrical, biological, or social-structural, or with social crises, and are enforced by sociocultural necessity. Indeed, there seems to be no way to divorce any camp activity from camp society since all endeavors by the internees were in some way a response to their confinement—both individual and collective. Ultimately the decision to do anything was a means to preserve the group. Granted, camp theater was largely the domain of a few individuals (Saito and Murayama, for example), but they were attempting collective effects. Nisei theater, then, developed in response to camp “rhythms” of the social-structural type, namely the recognition that theoretical assimilation was impossible without some form of aesthetic acculturation. The organizers of camp theater recognized a prevalent social crisis: that their social fabric was about to be severely challenged or even destroyed by Nisei who were described by Thomas and Nishimoto as an “insecure and increasingly resentful people” (vii). Theater therefore became one answer to a situation of sociocultural necessity—perhaps the only answer other than sports9 proposed by Nisei themselves. This relationship between theater and social necessity is made even more apparent by the fact that the performers as well as the spectators were of equal
cultural "rank": each was an internee, each was deprived of basic constitutional rights due to his or her heritage. Using Anne C. Burson’s definition of folk drama—“presented by members of a group to members of the same reference group” (316)—we can determine that camp theater was dependent upon group identification. Once the internments redefined the type of ethnic identification present among the Nisei, the collective needs of the group were addressed through various social outlets, theater being just one of them (sports were certainly another). Therefore, what the administration may have supported as a good way to combat boredom and to continue the process of assimilation, the participants may have encouraged primarily as a matter of group survival. The implication, then, is that camp theater managed to address simultaneously two conflicting arenas of cultural identity: that of the group as an autonomous entity and that of the group as active participant in a multicultural (i.e. “melting pot”) mainstream.

As a further distinction from liminoid phenomena, camp theater was generated within work settings (indeed, within the setting of all concerns of existence). While traditional liminoid theater positions spectators in an area distinct from work environments (via an elaborate theater building, for example), liminal camp theater positioned its spectators in the barracks, albeit barracks made to conform to the practical necessities of a theatrical production. Through the use of place, camp theater allows for the fact that liminal phenomena are culturally integrated into the total social process.

Turner finds that liminal phenomena reflect group history or its collective experience over time. He notes that such phenomena “are often reversals, inversions, disguises, negations . . . But they share their mass, collective character” (54). This he
contrasts with liminoid occasions which are labeled “idiosyncratic, quirky [and] . . .
generated by specific names, individuals, and in particular groups—'schools,' circles, and
coteries . . . These symbols are closer to the personal-psychological than to the
‘objective-social’ typological pole” (54). It is clear that camp theater, while
psychological in its effect on individual spectators, was meant to possess collective
character. The Tule Lake Little Theatre’s manifesto exemplifies this view; its emphasis
on “cultural refinement” and escapism was directed at the internees as a group. In this
context we may also contrast Barrack with High School theater. Under the auspices of
the “school,” High School productions often were representative offerings of sub-groups
within the internee population: the Senior class play, for example. In such instances, the
performers/producers identified themselves as members of particular classes, determined
not by socio-economics but by age group, and geared their work toward members of this
same sub-group (thus, plays about teen romance and generational conflict were
produced); such presentations were “collective” only in a very narrow sense. By
contrast, Barrack theater was geared more toward the populace in general and the fact
that it was comprised entirely of internees.

Turner also posits that liminal phenomena tend to be eufunctional. They are not,
as are liminoid phenomena, parts of social critiques meant to expose “the injustices,
inefficiencies, and immoralities of the mainstream economic and political structures and
organizations” (55). It is indeed tempting to assume that camp theater, particularly if
freed from what may be seen as extensive control by a Caucasian administration, was an
outlet for revolution. The facts do not support such an interpretation. Instead, camp
theater was an attempt to sustain the status quo and to affirm participation in dominant society. This is not to say that recognition of injustice may not be read into the plays chosen for production, but such aspects of these plays were not the conscious motivation behind the fact that they were chosen. Even the act of creating theater at the camps—in and of itself—was not meant to challenge authority or to condemn unfair practices. Generally such actions were taken via more violent means.

In addition, despite outbreaks of violence at the camps, the Japanese as a group seeking assimilation in the United States rarely resorted to actions intended to shake up the status quo (that is, the Caucasian patriarchy). Instead, as Harry H.L. Kitano argues, they utilized a rather consistent strategy of adaptation:

What is this strategy? The Japanese themselves like to compare it to a small stream; like a stream they have followed the contours of the land, followed the lines of least resistance, avoided direct confrontation, and developed at their own pace, always shaped by the external realities of the larger society. It is basically a strategy of accommodation. (2-3)

It is not hard to imagine that Barrack theater, started and administered by Nisei, would out of the Japanese cultural blueprint use theater in non-confrontational ways.

"In complex, modern society," writes Turner, "both types [liminal and liminoid] coexist in a sort of cultural pluralism . . . But for most people the liminoid is still felt to be freer than the liminal, a matter of choice, not obligation" (55). Here, too, camp theater skews a rather neat definition. There is no doubt that camp theater was optional; interested parties could pay the 10 or 15 cents for a ticket to spend an evening in the theater. Theater groups sought out audience members just as any economically-driven group would, via word of mouth, newspaper notices, and the like. But this does not mean
that camp theater as a cultural phenomena was not developed to be obligatory for the populace, nor that it was strictly entertainment. In practice, camp theater was a rather complex phenomena, serving many purposes—some individual, but all collective.

When we speak of camp theater we are speaking generally of a liminal phenomenon. For all its similarities to traditional liminoid theater, the conditions of confinement rendered camp theater uniquely as something else indeed, yet the empirical evidence even compromises Turner's view of liminality; \textit{vis à vis} theater. Whereas Turner sees things that look like ritual in a theatrical context (such as Las Vegas nights at Bar Mitzvahs), camp theater allows us to see something that looks like theater in a ritualistic context. But once again the problem of perspective must be addressed and accounted for. Theater remained for the Caucasian administration a liminoid phenomenon; it is doubtful that, as sympathetic as many camp officials were toward the plight of the interned, they could understand theater's function from the perspective of an evacuee. For the internee spectator, theater may have been mostly entertainment, and therefore liminoid, but may have at times reached a surface level of liminality (if, for example, the spectator recognized the need for acculturation through theater). For the Nisei theater organizer, however, theater had to be both liminoid and liminal at the same time: liminoid in order to gain an audience, liminal if their goals of assimilation and group identity were to be achieved. It is from this perspective—that which I believe to have taken the greatest account of the uniqueness of the internment camp situation—that I have emended Turner and developed Transitional Liminality. A phenomenon which is labeled Transitional Liminality is one which closely resembles the liminal, as does the
liminoid, but without falling completely into the liminoid category. Furthermore, the ritualistic base of this type of phenomenon does not involve any type of religious practice or belief, yet hopes to reap a reward which will ensure group survival on some level. Rather than a good harvest, Nisei theater hoped to reap acceptance into the mainstream via a newfound aesthetic awareness. Otherwise, given the hostility toward the Japanese which permeated the (especially) West Coast of the United States, and the rapidly aging Issei population, even the insulated Japantowns were poised for destruction.

Because camp theater organizers tried to merge the boundaries of liminal ritual and liminoid theater, they may be said to inhabit simultaneously that which Richard Schechner has labeled “special worlds”:

> A special world is created where people can make the rules, rearrange time, assign value to things, and work for pleasure. This “special world” is not gratuitous but a vital part of human life. No society, no individual can do without it. (11)

The fact that every individual of every society must, of necessity, inhabit such a world from time to time speaks to the universality of theater and its purpose. Given this, the existence of relocation camp theater is understandable and, because of the inevitability Schechner assigns to “special worlds,” expected wherever humans function under any circumstances.

But Schechner’s “special worlds” explain theater in terms of an activity once-removed from everyday life, to wit,

EVERYDAY LIFE ↔ THEATER.

This paradigm suggests the free and easy transfer from one world to another, with each world a reference for the other. The existence of relocation camps, however,
compromises and problematizes this model considerably for theatrical activities were really twice-removed from everyday life:

EVERYDAY LIFE ↔ RELOCATION CAMPS ↔ THEATER.

The relationship between theater and everyday life has now been interfered with by the internments. Theater is no longer a direct referent for everyday life nor is everyday life a direct referent for theater. Instead, everyday life can only be seen through the window of the relocation camps and theater, in reverse, through this same window. And, because the camps were everyday life for their inhabitants, sometimes for up to three years, the relationship between everyday life and the camps becomes even more obscure.

What I am suggesting here is that camp theater resembles the liminal not by choice so much as by design. The very existence of the relocation camps makes camp theater liminal. Again, the distinction between Barrack theater and High School theater is useful. High School theater remains liminoid. Even though it also served as a tool for assimilation, that purpose was assigned to it by outsiders, the Caucasian administration. It did not contextualize its raison d'être by taking account of where it took place. Barrack theater, on the other hand, identified its raison d'être from within its own reference group and responded to its surroundings. Apart from the camps, High School theater would remain liminoid but Barrack theater would not exist.

Performers and Spectators

Having determined that camp theater possessed a liminality which traditional theater does not, we may then turn to the participants of camp theater to determine their
role within the cultural event. We may identify these participants as “actors” and “audience,” but in so doing we lose the sense of liminality, or cultural imperative, which made camp theater so unique. Just as camp theater forces us to rethink our use of words such as “culture” and “ritual,” so too must we redefine “actor” and “audience.” In turn, we must also modify the type of communication both parties bring to performance.

The general term “participant” seems apropos to camp theater and allows us to include those who were not actors; stage hands, prop masters, and make-up designers also “participate” in the craft of theater. “Audience,” however, seems too broad a term which does not account for either its role in shaping the cultural event (an audience is as much of a participant in the theatrical event as the actors) or its position as receptor of extra-textual communication. “Congregation” appears more to the point and may include both its meanings: as either a secular or religious gathering. Again, perspective fashions our vocabulary. For Barrack theater organizers, an audience was a congregation even though members of that congregation most likely did not think of themselves as such. Furthermore, all camp theater participants were members of the congregation for they all inhabited the same cultural landscape as internees desirous of acculturation/assimilation. So, we have a particular cultural event where performer/congregants create a liminal event for spectator/congregants under the guise of liminoid theater.

As noted above, the interplay between performers and spectators shapes the theatrical event. It is the receptiveness of the spectators which determines the efficacy of the communication being attempted by the performers. Susan Bennett remarks, “it is the audience which finally ascribes meaning and usefulness to any cultural product” (167).
That being the case, the organizers of Barrack theater were faced with a two-fold problem: to produce credible theater and to generate aesthetic awareness which would lead to an acculturated congregation. Only the first of these goals were within the control of the performers, even though the spectators still decided whether or not the performances were any good. Thus, the communication undertaken by the performers was dependent upon the quality of the performances themselves. As Richard Bauman explains in *Verbal Art as Performance* (1977), “[p]erformance involves on the part of the performer an accountability to an audience for the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content” (11). It therefore behooved the Tule Lake Little Theatre to present polished and engaging performances so that they could maintain what Bauman calls an emergent social structure of performance:

This general rhetorical power of performance and its potential for social control has been widely documented. When the performer gains control in this way, the potential for transformation of the social structure may become available to him as well. (44)

The internee performers of Barrack theater did indeed attempt to transform the social structure, but not in a way we expect given contemporary avant-garde and radical theater practices. Their mission seems to have been to transform their own social structure to conform to an established status quo which had already selected and canonized specific texts as representative of itself. While their approach (that is, accommodation with the status quo) may seem the antithesis of true social consciousness which usually seeks to create an “oppositional popular culture” (Kershaw 18), the fact remains that the Nisei performers were every bit as concerned with their identity and access to power as contemporary ethnic artists, although their strategy was to de-
emphasize otherness rather than, as many contemporary artists do, emphasize it. The fact that Barrack theater attempted to change the community which witnessed it—a community of which the performers were a part—places it squarely within the confines of the theater of social engagement, which, as Baz Kershaw explains, uses as its starting point “the nature of [an] audience and its community” (5).

It is the issue of community which develops the resemblance between Barrack theater and what Edith Isaacs has labeled “Tributary Theater.” Tributary Theater was identified by Isaacs as a progressive and widespread phenomenon involving the growing number of experimental, “Little Theater,” groups—“amateurs of professional quality,” as Isaacs put it (568)—which appeared across the United States. Citing the dearth of aesthetic value on New York’s Broadway stage—then the center of theatrical activity in America—Isaacs argues that the Tributary Theater held the promise of developing new talent (playwrights, designers, actors) which could rival that found in New York:

Suppose that in the cities of America we could establish twenty, fifty, or even one hundred such patient theatres, in the character of the cities they represent . . . each with a director and leading players of professional quality, if not of professional experience, playing the best of the world’s plays, new and old, and also seeing and noting their audiences. In ten years time a universal theatre, each unit a creative entity, each fertilizing the others and all paying tribute to and taking tribute from New York. (“The Tributary Theatre” 570)

She foresees a theatrical phenomenon which develops its own nativistic qualities.

Arguing that a good Tributary Theater director knows his or her community, Isaacs takes into account a larger venue than simply the theater building. In other words, she recognizes that context is an important factor in determining theatrical efficacy:
It is not at all important to have the men and women who live in the prairie towns in Kansas join an organization which will permit them to go to the theatre, professional or amateur, ten times a year. What is important is to have the performances they see relate somehow to their lives and the quality of life around them. ("The Tributary Theatre" 579)

She further stresses the importance of a theater which "best represent[s] the character and the morality, the humor and the poetry, the ideas and ambitions of the locale" ("Meeting the Main Stream" 624).

Isaacs therefore envisions amateur theater groups which are sensitive to the values and needs of their prospective audiences, but which also operate to foster talent suitable for the more mainstream requirements of Broadway. Her insights have proven to be quite prophetic, for in the years between 1926 (when Isaacs' work on the Tributary Theater first appeared) and 1942 (when the internment camps were built) theater became a much more visible presence on the American landscape. By 1940, theater was more accessible to interested parties who wished to do more than simply attend productions. Theater education, for example, became part of university curricula throughout the country (Brockett 545). Thus, while the Nisei, by and large, did not immerse themselves in the growing popularity of American theater and theater education, the internment camps, ironically, provided the context for them to do so. Furthermore, the activities of Barrack theater groups such as the Tule Lake Little Theatre echoed Isaacs' ideas regarding the theater's connection to its community (at least from the organizer's point of view).
Camp Theater and Social Consciousness

It is no secret that Western theater over the last thirty years has been in some respects revolutionized by the oftentimes radical movement toward social consciousness in art. Theatrical artists from the 1960s onward have sought to identify the pressing socioeconomic/political problems of those seen to be oppressed by an all-too comfortable status quo. Certain forms of theater were at the service of the oppressed and performances were often brought directly to the people—on street corners and bus stops—and out of the theater building, the "physical representative of the art which dominant ideologies have both created and promoted" (Bennett 136). Far from solely identifying social injustices, the movement toward social consciousness also decentered theater texts and experimented with form so as to challenge the dominance of "drama," with its reliance on literary conventions such as narrative, over "performance," which "breaks down the illusion of rational control and power over meaning" (Vanden Heuval 5). Performance itself is now treated as an autonomous artform as a result of such experimentation. It is not uncommon for performance art, protest theater, and other forms of socially-conscious iconoclastic theater to share the theatrical spotlight with traditional forms of drama, often providing more compelling entertainment than the vacuous productions that mainstream theater has of late offered.

It is my contention that internment camp theater—specifically Barrack theater—was a form of social consciousness which (obviously) predates the accepted beginnings of the current movement by some two decades. I believe that the social consciousness which characterizes contemporary radical theater was similarly operative at Tule Lake
and addresses an equally oppressed constituency. The major difference between contemporary and Barrack theater is that in the post-1960s world, the dominant ideology (aka, the status quo) is exposed, debunked, and generally rejected from the outside in (that is, from the margins). Barrack theater embraces and accepts the dominant ideology, strives to be a part of it, and "moves" from the inside out. In Barrack theater the margins try to lose their marginality, thus gaining social power through homogenization; in the contemporary avant-garde the margins attempt to become autonomous and will homogenize only when the status quo changes. One strives for the status quo to change, the other changes itself. Still, I believe that the "raw materials" (a dominant ideology, an oppressed and marginalized group) as well as the presence of socially conscious artists renders camp theater as equivalent, but certainly not equal to, contemporary socially conscious theater (herein known simply as "contemporary").

Let us examine the characteristics which both Barrack and contemporary theater possess:

Socially-conscious artists.

An oppressed group.

An antagonistic relationship with the status quo.

Avenue which is "owned" by the oppressed rather than built by the status quo for the status quo.

"Virtually every form of injustice in U.S. history has served to stimulate socially conscious artists," argues Paul Von Blum in *The Critical Vision: A History of Social and Political Art in the U.S.* (3). The internment of American citizens under the guise of
military security certainly qualifies as an injustice and indeed there have been a number of contemporary artists who have responded with outrage to the internments through their work. But the work of the socially conscious art created during the internments takes on a distinctly different guise— that of accommodation and acceptance rather than revolt.

While radical art seeks change to ensure that the artist is no longer a "servant of the state" (Castriota 13), internee theatrical art seeks change so that the artist (and the spectator) indeed becomes an operative of the state. The argument may be that it is better to be a player in the game than not be allowed to participate. That the internee artists politicized their work as they did (the embrace of the status quo), to my mind, does not make them ineffective social artists. Rather, I view them as every bit as socially conscious as our most radical contemporary performers. The similarity between Nisei internee performers and, say, the Bread and Puppet Theater lies in the fact that both groups responded to injustice; I see the response as the determinant for social consciousness in art, not the nature or political ideology of that response. Social consciousness, from this perspective, need not be defined as that which adheres to a particular political point of view (which would render a differing viewpoint something other than true social consciousness). From any political standpoint it is the response to what is perceived to be unjust social conditions.

The criterion of an oppressed group, like that of a level of social injustice, is fairly obviously fulfilled by the internment camps. The level of oppression, however, differs between contemporary and Barrack theater. In contemporary theater, socially conscious artists bring their message (often one of rebellion) to those they perceive to be
oppressed, or to make complacent and uninformed audiences aware of oppressions against others. For example, the San Francisco Mime Troupe's 1985 was both a cry against the reelection of Ronald Reagan and an effort to get Bay area residents to register to vote (an effort which was successful. Van Erven 41). While the Mime Troupe's members may believe themselves to be as oppressed as those witnessing their productions, they also suggest by their performance that they have taken a decisive step away from their oppressed state through heightened awareness of social problems and political action. Although the Troupe does what it can to "break down any social or psychological barriers between themselves and their audience" (Van Erven 27), there is always an "on" time when the performers become the purveyors of information needed by audiences to overcome oppression. Socially conscious artists, argues Von Blum, rarely suffer as much as the people they portray. The internee performers of Barrack theater, however, were in most respects equally oppressed despite their position as artists and despite the fact that they too had "on" times. Performer or spectator, they were internees all; the rank of socially conscious artist did not for a moment free the internee from his confinement. And, given the fact that with rare exception (Sada Murayama of Tule Lake, no doubt), internee performers were working in the theater for the first time in their lives, the purposes of performance were valid for both spectators and artists in equal measure. The level of oppression, then, in Barrack theater was more concentrated (although more subtle) than in contemporary theater. What in contemporary theater is chiefly a condition of audience, in Barrack theater is a condition of audience as well as performer.
This breakdown of the audience/performer split is certainly more endemic to folk drama than to what we might call traditional theater. Petr Bogatyrev's early (1938) work in folk theater recognizes that the relationship between performer and spectator is informed by the spectator's knowledge that the artist has an identity beyond that of the character he or she portrays: "the audience in folk theater continually confronts the role which an actor-peasant plays with the actor's own private life" (47). Labeling this recognition "artistic duplexity," Bogatyrev asserts that it is "impossible to identify the player with the role he plays, that no equation can be made between the actor and the character whom he represents, that the costume and mask and gestures of the actor are only a sign of a sign of the character portrayed by him" (48). While obvious to our contemporary knowledge of theater, and even strived for by contemporary artists, I believe that artistic duplexity was also fully operational at the Barrack theater level. Spectators may not have known the performers personally, but they did know them as fellow internees performing in barracks--the physical representation of their collective oppression.

That the internees lived through an antagonistic relationship with the status quo is hardly an assertion in need of support. From the injustice of being paid far less than the Caucasians for exactly the same work (high school teachers, for example) to the indignity of living in barracks, the internees to this day harbor feelings of resentment and outright anger about their treatment at the hands of the Caucasian majority. However, despite the existence of such antagonisms, Barrack theater did not find its purpose in confrontational relationships. Indeed, at Tule Lake, theater ceased to be viable once physical
confrontation with the administration became an everyday threat. Prior to this threat, Barrack theater at Tule Lake embraced that which radical theater terms “the commercial apparatus of bourgeois mass culture” (Van Erven 2) and attempted to become an active part of it. Again, I find the fact that antagonisms existed and created a backdrop for the theater to be the recognizable similarity between Barrack and contemporary theater.

The barrack itself—although never ceasing to be a barrack—nevertheless was decorated to resemble a conventional theater building, thus making it an important part of the aforementioned bourgeois apparatus of culture. Susan Bennett points out that the theater building is “a physical representative of the art which dominant ideologies have both created and promoted” (136). Thus, contemporary theater tends to remove itself from such a venue, preferring to take performances to the streets or other such “open” areas “owned” by the oppressed. However, Barrack theater organizers attempted to be a part of the dominant ideology and therefore used their barrack in ways which would be unconscionable to radical sensibilities. I maintain, though, that the Nisei used their venue in much the same way. They “owned” the Barrack by fashioning it into a theater (just as they fashioned their living quarters into works of art); just because they did not represent it as oppressive (although they may have recognized it as such) does not mean that it was any less appropriated by socially conscious artists.

**The Significance of Nisei Theater**

The questions which surround the phenomenon of Nisei theater operate on many levels and require a confrontation with some of the fundamental questions of theater
itself: namely, what is the relationship between theater and ritual, and what role does either theater or ritual play in the daily lives of human beings? More specifically, Nisei theater focuses on the often blurred line where theater and ritual meet, leading to the discovery that what appears superficially to be theater may be considered a form of ritual. This is particularly true of Barrack theater where the problem of assimilation was addressed in what I believe to be a ritualistic environment. Nisei theater further demonstrates that it is a phenomenon which exists comfortably in both the world of theater and the world of ritual simultaneously. It is this “in between” nature which designates Nisei theater as liminal even as it seems to be just another example of liminoid theater.

Nisei theater also examines (or, rather, re-examines) the role of audience and venue, two overlooked (until recently) yet vital parts of the experience of theater. Such an examination presents some difficulties which cannot be ignored. The fact that the Japanese culture, particularly at that moment in history, was defined not by economic classes but generationally (Issei and Nisei), determined not necessarily by age but by country of birth and citizenship, compromises general musings about the nature of audience (that it represents one particular socioeconomic class, for example). The dual identity of the Nisei further complicates the study of audience. The Nisei simultaneously inhabited the worlds of their parents, the Issei, and their American citizen brethren, never quite fitting in either. Nisei theater (both Barrack and High School) attempted to bridge the gap between the generations vying for control within the Nisei. The study of audience, therefore, in relation to Nisei theater, is not the study of passive spectators, but
rather the study of congregants without identity. How then does this unique relationship between performers and spectators "fit" within common notions of audience? If new definitions for audience emerge because of Nisei theater, must they be unique to the circumstances of the internments or might they help to broaden existing definitions?

Regarding questions of venue, Nisei theater is always framed by the internment camps themselves, their barbed wire, their barracks, their desolation. No matter where theater was produced—a high school auditorium or a makeshift theater in a barrack—it was always within the boundaries of the camps. These boundaries were both physical (barbed wire and the like) and ideological (the unconstitutional confinement of citizens). How did venue affect performance? How could theater ever be an emotional escape from oppression if it was performed within the very site of oppression? To whom does theater space belong? Can space really be transformed, albeit temporarily, into a world out of time and place? Did the internment camps destroy any hope of such a transformation (that would ordinarily take place in another venue) or is the transformation of theater space never achieved no matter the conditions?

Still other factors determine the way Nisei theater should be examined. The history of the internments cannot be discounted, nor can the specific circumstances of each individual camp. Its organization, the temperament of its inhabitants, as well as the level of dedication and/or experience of its theater organizer(s) all create the contexts which characterize Nisei theater. It is context which most affects the way Nisei theater may be approached, for until specific contexts are identified the danger always exists that Nisei theater as a cultural/historical phenomenon will be subject to oversimplification.
and blanket statements about life in the internment camps and even about the nature of theater itself. I have seen myself wrestle with such oversimplifications as I researched this topic: that camp life was horrific, that plays were chosen for political reasons, that the WRA was at all times well-meaning but paranoid. Sometimes the scenarios I conjured were more interesting than the realities of history, but it is these realities which tell the tale of Nisei theater the way it should be told.

The tale that should be told about Nisei theater is that it was a theater which exceeded its boundaries. Far from being a fruitless endeavor designed to pass the time, Nisei theater took on various characteristics depending upon the contexts assigned to it. In both forms of Nisei theater--High School and Barrack--the issue of assimilation was of paramount importance. But beyond that common characteristic, Nisei theater could be many things. It could be the tool of an education policy or the first step toward acculturation. It could be a waste of a depressed and bored spectator's time or the only forum available to witness Japanese actors in non-Asian roles. It could be a way to develop a sense of community or the redefinition of a community. It could be liminal or liminoid. It could be ritual or theater. Nisei theater was all of these things simultaneously, which is precisely why it continually defies facile categorization while at the same time requires the creation of new categories to explain its function. Nisei theater tears down to build anew. Perhaps that is its greatest contribution: it challenges our present perspectives (on theater, the internments, etc.) and promises to continue to do so.

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NOTES

1. I am, of course, aware of the Bat Mitzvah, the *rite de passage* for young Jewish girls. However, for the sake of this argument I shall use the sex-specific Bar Mitzvah, referring solely to boys. Aside from making language a little less cumbersome, I want my discussion to reflect that the original intent of this particular Jewish practice excluded females and some Jews still consider the Bat Mitzvah to be a bastardization of the ancient ritual.

2. I am herein using the term “participant” to mean someone who actively engages in the event: one who dances, one who eats. “Witness” shall refer to a more passive engagement: one who watches the ceremony, for example. Granted, a witness to the Torah reading, as a member of a congregation, is indeed a participant in the liminal ritual, but for these purposes, he or she shall be considered a passive participant.

3. I credit theater with being a more important cultural endeavor than sports because sports were something that the Nisei enjoyed prior to their internment. Theater was a wholly new experience for most (if not all) Nisei and therefore did not have an established place within the Nisei community. Theater became a unique, unprecedented answer to the difficulties which arose due to the unique, unprecedented internments.

4. Wakako Yamauchi is perhaps the leading playwright of the internments, although all of these plays are about the camps and were not written from a perspective within the camps. Her plays include *12-1-A*, which takes place in an internment camp.

5. The case may certainly be made that High School theater also addressed the problem of assimilation and I concede that both the Barrack theater organizers and the WRA (through its education policy) grappled with assimilation for the Nisei. However, I believe the act of creating theater in the barracks was in itself a ritualistic act, while the extracurricular activity that was High School theater was not. Theater at the High School could be replaced by too many other endeavors (participation in sports, art classes, wood-working shops, etc.) to be, in my mind, a truly ritualistic.

6. This definition of Nisei theater audiences—"congregants without identity"—is dependent, of course, on context and perspective. I think the concept embraces both types of Nisei theater since organizers of both varieties prioritized Nisei assimilation (which might give them a new identity). However, I also believe that a fair number of the Nisei spectators consciously used theater as means to develop identity. I'm
reminded of Mas Yamasaki’s (Tule Lake) comments about attending plays to see Asian performers in "non traditional" roles (that is, as something other than servants or villains). I have every reason to believe that Yamasaki's views were shared by a number of his fellow internees.
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