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## **"It's War That's Cruel": The Evolution of Wartime Representation and 'The Other' in the American Musical**

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# “It’s War That's Cruel”: The Evolution of Wartime Representation and ‘The Other’ in the American Musical

A Thesis by

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Orange, CA

Wilkinson College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in War & Society

August, 2021

Committee in charge:

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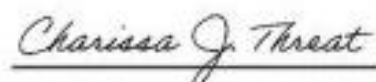
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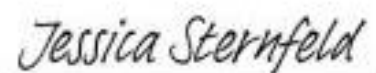
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Jessica Sternfeld, PhD.

August, 2021

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American Musical

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## ABSTRACT

### “It’s War That’s Cruel”: The Evolution of Wartime Representation and ‘The Other’ in the American Musical

by Leana ‘Lee’ Sottile

Musical theater has historically been a venue for Americans to come to terms with our past and present on both a national and an individual level as it stages and restages war mythology on the Broadway Stage. As the nation has won, lost, and abandoned foreign conflicts, the connotation, remembrance, and commemoration of war in American memory has shifted from romanticizing former conflicts to renegotiating their memory. Thus, this project examines how twentieth-century war memory is represented in the American musical, starting in the 1940s and continuing up to the present day. To do so, the phenomenon will be examined through case studies of three representative musicals across three thematic periods: the 1940s–1950s through the lens of *South Pacific*, the 1960s–1990s with *Miss Saigon*, and 2000s to the present day through *Allegiance*. Subsequently, as these musicals center on war in the Asia Pacific, this project examines their construction of the Asian and Pacific Islander “Other” and how it both measures war mythology and has shifted over time.

As America has gone and returned from war, how those wars were experienced and subsequently remembered has changed national attitudes. Thus, war-based musicals have reacted to these attitudes and made strides towards more inclusive and objective portrayals of wartime and postwar experiences. By examining musicals in relation to representing war and shifts of opinion towards American war-making, this thesis illustrates how war mythology and the Asian and Pacific Islander “Other” has been negotiated and renegotiated on Broadway to highlight the significance of this intersection in musical theatre and war and society studies at large.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
 <b>Chapter I – Historiography.....</b>	 <b>10</b>
Theatrical Representations of War .....	10
Theatre Utilization in Wartime.....	12
Applied Theatre .....	15
Performance Studies Analyses: War as Performance and Spectacle .....	17
 <b>Chapter II – South Pacific: The Good War’s Golden Age (1940s–1950s).....</b>	 <b>22</b>
Case Study: Rogers and Hammerstein’s South Pacific (1949) .....	27
Mythologizing the War in the Pacific .....	30
Orientalism at Work: South Pacific’s Asian and Pacific Islanders .....	41
The Good War’s Golden Age .....	45
 <b>Chapter III – Miss Saigon: Grappling with Wartime Gravity (1960s-1990s).....</b>	 <b>47</b>
Case Study: Boublil and Schönberg’s Miss Saigon (1991) .....	52
Staging War Guilt and Vietnam as an American Tragedy .....	56
Orientalism On Stage: Fetishizing and Racializing Vietnam.....	65
The Good War’s Golden Age .....	72
 <b>Chapter IV – Allegiance: Rewriting War Memory &amp; Mythology .....</b>	 <b>75</b>
Case Study: Jay Kuo’s Allegiance (2015) .....	80
The Good War? Negotiating Historical Myths and Realities Onstage.....	84
Gaman: To Endure with Dignity and Fortitude.....	92
Resist and Fight: No-No Boys, Draft Resisters, and the 442nd .....	96
Nuancing Old War Myths and Telling New War Stories .....	102
 <b>Conclusion – Culture Changes the Musical, the Musical Changes Culture.....</b>	 <b>105</b>
 <b>Bibliography .....</b>	 <b>112</b>

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ANC	Army Nurse Corps
AVRN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
JACL	Japanese American Citizens League
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
Seabees	United States Naval Construction Battalions
TAPS	Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors
USO	United Service Organizations
WRA	War Relocation Authority



## Introduction

When he saw the Broadway musical *South Pacific* at New York's Majestic Theatre in 1949, Pacific War veteran Richard M. Young felt himself "slip right back to 1944 and '45 and felt every emotion, as if [he] were living it all over" again. The show captured "those moments of beauty, of horror, of joy, of sadness" he experienced during the war.<sup>1</sup> Decades later, actor Greg Watanabe remarked how his "personal family connection to Heart Mountain and [the Japanese American] incarceration experience ma[de him] feel responsible" and privileged to tell the story of *Allegiance* to audiences.<sup>2</sup> Traveling to the Potomac, reviewer Susan Galbraith at DC Theatre Scene writes how "watching [the *Miss Saigon* revival], from the first sound of a helicopter – as ubiquitous as it was painful – [sent her] back in an emotional place... [that] triggers feelings of fear, disgust, and shame" regarding the Vietnam war period.<sup>3</sup>

All three of these stories have something in common: the deep emotional impact of war, myth, and memory in the American musical. These selections are only snapshots of the many people deeply affected by how twentieth-century conflicts have been represented on the Broadway stage. Whether one is a veteran, a member of a war generation, a performer, or a general audience member, war musicals have the potential to shape people's reflections on war and contribute to the building and dismantling of myths surrounding American wars and their legacy.

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<sup>1</sup> [Letter to Mary Martin from Richard M. Young, Box 50], Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

<sup>2</sup> Greg Watanabe, quoted in *Allegiance to Broadway: The Dream. The Story. The Journey of a Musical*, directed by Greg Vander Veer (2018, Sing Out Louise Productions), DVD.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Galbraith, "As the Vietnam War defined a generation, does *Miss Saigon* reveal ours?" *DC Theatre Scene*, December 27, 2018, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://dctheatrescene.com/2018/12/27/as-the-vietnam-war-defined-a-generation-does-miss-saigon-reveal-ours/>.

It is commonly observed that culture responds to current events and vice versa, and American musical theatre is no different. Despite perceived reputations as a frivolous, campy, and escapist artform, musicals have responded to social change, political turmoil, and advocated for inclusivity and diversity over its history. Similarly, war has been a constant backdrop since musical theatre's Golden Age in the 1940s and 1950s and has since confronted everything from staging air raids in the London Blitz to the Fall of Saigon to the impact of the Hiroshima atomic bombing. American twentieth- and twenty-first-century wars have been examined both onstage and off, especially as musical theatre practitioners have worked with veterans' organizations and the USO alike. As creators and audiences lived through the Second World War, Vietnam, and the War on Terror, musicals have confronted these conflicts, their memory, and their legacy for America to make meaning out of them.

This project examines how the memory of twentieth-century wars is represented in the American musical, starting in the 1940s and continuing up to the present day. To do so, the phenomenon will be examined through case studies of three representative musicals across three thematic periods: the 1940s–1950s through the lens of *South Pacific* (Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II, and Jonathan Logan, 1947), the 1960s–1990s with *Miss Saigon* (Claude-Michel Schönberg, Alain Boublil, and Richard Maltby Jr., 1991), and 2000s to the present day through *Allegiance* (Jay Kuo, Marc Acito, and Lorenzo Thione, 2015). During each period, musical theatre grappled with war memory differently as on-stage depictions moved away from romanticism and towards attempts at inclusivity. This research argues that this shift is influenced by how American perceptions of war shifted in the wake of World War II, the Vietnam War, and the War on Terror. These musicals present narratives related to two American wars in Asia, World War II and the Vietnam War, and examine perspectives on both the war and home fronts.

In the discussion of the Second World War, the research examines American service members' experiences in the Pacific Theatre as well as the incarceration of Japanese Americans in the western United States. The examination of the Vietnam War focuses on the last days of the war and its subsequent legacy in American memory.

Due to the wide timespan under discussion, the sources for the project vary from case study to case study. Generally, each will rely on librettos, lyrics, interviews, and archival recordings of the performances to draw conclusions that are juxtaposed with the historical realities of the covered conflicts. The examination of *South Pacific* is also reliant on the manuscript collections of Oscar Hammerstein II, Richard Rodgers, and Joshua from the Library and Congress and New York Public Library. More akin to traditional historical research, these letters, business memos, archival recordings, and period newspaper articles provide the context of *South Pacific*'s creation as well as the involvement and response of the United States Armed Forces. Considering *Miss Saigon* is more recent, there is a strong base of digitized primary sources which includes interviews, podcasts, newspaper reviews, and archival recordings. This is not the case for *Allegiance*, whose contemporaneity has meant that not much scholarly analysis has been conducted on the available research materials, primarily press material and published interviews. To fill the gap, I have conducted interviews with several people affiliated with *Allegiance*, including Elliot Masie (producer), Lorenzo Thione (producer, co-librettist, and film director), and Greg Watanabe (who originated the role of historical figure Mike Masaoka) about their experiences with this show, its impact, and its legacy.

Currently, there is no distinct monograph on interpreting war and its memory in musical theatre. Discussion of war memory in musicals is often relegated to articles in journals or book chapters as opposed to the central focus of most theatre studies works. Many of the works

looking at war-centered musicals foreground examinations of race and gender over the discussion of war and its memory, leaving the field's war and society discussion sparse.<sup>4</sup> This thesis employs war and society analyses, which are less focused on war elements like battle specifics and instead holistically and focuses on aspects such as common soldiers, civilian displacement, the home front, and war mythology. As opposed to traditional war studies, the interdisciplinary study of war and society examines the sociopolitical, moral, and cultural elements of how communities go to war and deal with its ramifications.

Similarly, while war and society scholars have often engaged with other elements of culture, such as the music of the Vietnam War and Marvel Comics during the Cold War, musical theatre has not been touted. Because the established methodology for this area of study is limited, this project utilizes musical theatre historian Raymond Knapp's framework of analysis from *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (2005), especially in the chapters "American Mythologies" and "Dealing with the Second World War." Knapp traces American artistic roots: how it defines American identity; creates and dismantles myths about national identity; and musical theatre's role in the process of othering. Knapp's methodology analyzing the lyrics, song form, plot, and staging to assess historical reality alongside musical theatre representation will be discussed further in Chapter I.

As each musical discussed centers with war in the Asia-Pacific, it is apt to discuss the influences of Orientalism and subsequent othering of Asian and Pacific Islander peoples within the pieces. Originating in *Orientalism*, Edward W. Said examines the inaccurate and clichéd depiction of Asia, North Africa, and the Middle East in Western scholarship. Said argues that

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<sup>4</sup> For example, in Yutian Wong's *Choreographing Asian America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011) the chapter "Pedagogy of the Scantily Clad: Studying *Miss Saigon* in the Twenty-first Century" examines the legacy of the Vietnam War as part of the book's discussion of Orientalist discourse in modern American dance.

Western scholarship is based on imperial powers distinguishing themselves from the colonized by painting the former as progressive and logical and the latter as traditional, primitive, and exotic.<sup>5</sup> Orientalism is closely tied to the theory of ‘Othering,’ a process where a group sets themselves apart from another, usually by attributing negative characteristics to the other to generate an us-versus-them dynamic. Othering creates an ‘in’ group and ‘out’ group, building both cohesion amongst insiders and animosity towards outsiders, which can be used to justify the dehumanization of ‘the other’ especially in times of war. Modern war is no different and as such the musicals that engage with its legacy oftentimes feature othering as a core theme, especially surrounding Asian and Pacific Islander people who are the featured ‘Other’ in this thesis’ case studies.

These approaches will be employed alongside Paul Fussell’s war memory work in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975). In his chapter “Theater of War,” Fussell states that theatre and war are often conflated because “modern wars are fought by conscripted armies, whose members are only temporarily playing their ill-learned parts.”<sup>6</sup> This correlation is made more evident through the inherent theatricality of war as a spectacle with uniforms as costumes, military archetypes that seem like characters, and how soldiers suspend disbelief to better real-time trauma.<sup>7</sup> Fussell’s observations demonstrate how theatre is both an apt medium to contain war memory and to study war within. While individual memory is fickle, the collective memory of a war is charged with “universal literary and mythic” qualities which expose trends of how

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<sup>5</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York City: Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>6</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1975), 207.

<sup>7</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 207–8.

sectors of society process a war's events and its aftermath.<sup>8</sup> Musical theatre is but one reflection of this phenomenon, contending with myths and trends in how we remember these conflicts.

The following research employs two distinct lenses for understanding the portrayal of war in the Asia-Pacific in American musical theatre. The first half of Chapters 2-4 examine the representation of war alongside historical facts, war mythology, and sociopolitical contexts to highlight where these musicals portray war in constructive or detrimental ways onstage. The latter half of these chapters will examine these show's construction of the Asian 'Other' who serves as a key component in all of the works. The thread of applying this discussion of Orientalism and othering to theatre studies follows the trajectory of Asian American representation in musical theatre proposed in Diep Tran's *American Theatre* article with the descriptive title "Broadway's Yellow Fever: From *South Pacific* to *Allegiance*, The American Musical Has Traveled from Well-Intentioned Orientalism to Something Like Authenticity." The article highlights *South Pacific*, *Miss Saigon*, and *Allegiance* as focal points in Asian representation on Broadway, which is a conclusion this research expands upon.

While these shows are apt for examining race construction on their own, it is asinine to do so without looking at the wartime context that informed its creation. In the Second World War and the Vietnam War, Asian and Pacific Islander peoples were seen as enemies, victims, and unknowns, depending on the war's history and context. Wartime associations have made Asian and Pacific Islander representation muddy, especially when, except for *Allegiance*, artists with these backgrounds were not key creatives to inform the shows' creations. The lack of agency and proper representation for Asian characters, and by proxy Asian theatre practitioners,

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<sup>8</sup> Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 339

has contributed to intense stereotyping onstage and off. As theatre's history of doing so has generated a distinct Asian 'Other' in its war-based musicals, this thesis spotlights the creation and break from this paradigm over time by applying war and society methodology to better understand this phenomenon.

Musical theatre's representation of American war has seen three major trends that correspond with three respective time periods (the 1940s–1950s, the 1960s–1990s, and 2000s–present-day) discussed above along with the mythology surrounding the associated wars. This thesis examines how musical theatre has responded to how America has gone to and returned from its wars to mirror trends in how the nation views war, militarism, and its twentieth-century legacy. First, Chapter 1 will examine the historiography of where theatre and war studies intersect which includes four major areas: war representations onstage; mobilizing theatre during wartimes; the use of applied theatre in war zones; and examinations of war and militarization as both spectacle and performance. Once the state of the field is established, this thesis will analyze the three aforementioned periods with representative case studies in each.

Chapter 2 examines how in the 1940s through the 1950s, American musicals were proponents of American militarism that enthusiastically supported the military and their victory in the Second World War. Unapologetic and romantic, war-based musicals in this period were composites of war memory that helped construct the myth of the 'Good War.' The case study on *South Pacific* examines how the musical presents a gilded picture of rear areas service in World War II's Pacific Theatre. Devoid of onstage violence or death, Rogers and Hammerstein's work commemorates the myth of war as opposed to its realities and justifies American military presence in Asia-Pacific through employing traditional Orientalist tropes of primitive life and exoticism.

Chapter 3 examines how this celebratory attitude towards militarism changed in musicals as it did in popular opinion when America became entrenched in the war in Vietnam in the 1960s and 70s. The carnage, social upheaval, and political distrust that came with what at that time was America's longest war stained its reputation with negative connotations until the perceived success of the First Persian Gulf War. While still romanticized in some regards, musical theatre paralleled this shift against militarism by highlighting the horrors and human costs associated with war for its audiences to contend with. The examination of Boublil and Schönberg's *Miss Saigon* highlights how the musical exploits the trauma of Vietnamese people to better cope with America's legacy of war in Vietnam. Unlike Golden Age musicals, *Miss Saigon* would feature intense onstage violence and pose major war and society questions like if and when wars really end. However, the musical would do so by employing Orientalist tropes, robbing Vietnamese people of agency in their nation's history. The focus on soothing American war guilt made *Miss Saigon* about America, instead of Vietnam.

Chapter 4 examines how the movement towards inclusivity and addressing war and society questions has continued into the present day with two major shifts—war musicals' attempts to debunk historical myths and expose untold, niche war stories. This shift in understanding war, when combined with ample time to reflect on twentieth-century wars and the onset of the War on Terror, has influenced creators to aim for authenticity and further dismantle myths about war and create cautionary tales in an age of perpetual war.<sup>9</sup> With the distance of time, twenty-first-century musicals provide the counter-narratives and alternatives to traditional

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<sup>9</sup> Throughout this project, the term "authenticity" is used several times in juxtaposition to questions of mythology and romanticism. However, this is not to say that earlier portrayals are wrong or inauthentic to an individual's experience. Here, authenticity is used to describe the movement away from rose-colored imagery that is more inclusive of multiple war experiences, including that of women, racial minorities, perceived state enemies, civilians, and veterans. Thus, for purposes of this research, authenticity is aligned with more historically thorough, well-intentioned, and holistic portrayals of war as opposed to questions of right and wrong.



historical memory, telling marginalized communities' stories and encouraging audiences to reexamine the dominant historical narrative. The case study for this chapter features Jay Kuo's *Allegiance*, which is the first mainstream musical theatre representation of the Japanese American Second World War incarceration experience. *Allegiance* showcases the perseverance and resolve of the Japanese American community within the camps while also detailing the suffering, communal divisions, and injustices they experienced to give them agency in their history and tragedy. As opposed to hiding American injustices or soothing the guilt surrounding them, *Allegiance* directly calls these actions and larger American war mythology into question.

The lack of scholarship centered around the intersection of musical theatre and war highlights an important gap meriting study as musical theatre has been a constant and evolving composite of war memory, mythology, and history in American popular culture over the past century. As America has gone and returned from war, how those wars were experienced and subsequently remembered has changed national attitudes, be it as a hero complex or a crisis of confidence. Subsequently, war-based musicals have reacted to these attitudes by changing how war is represented on stage. The most notable shift has been away from wartime romanticism to better examine the realities of war to understand its impact on both soldiers and civilians in a more nuanced way. By examining musicals in relation to representing war and shifts of opinion towards American war-making, this thesis illustrates how war mythology has been negotiated and renegotiated on Broadway to highlight the significance of this intersection in theatre and war and society studies at large.

## Chapter I – Historiography

No full monographs exist on musical theatre and its representation of war, even though many of the medium's most renowned shows are based on war, violence, and revolution. Additionally, as musical theatre studies are still an emerging field, most of the established scholarship on theatre and war centers around straight plays. That being said, the study of theatre and warfare has generated prolific scholarship that encompasses different subject areas with their own historiographies. Major categories of theatre and war scholarship include theatrical representations of war; how theatre is utilized during times of war; the use of applied theatre in war zones; and the performance studies analyses of war as spectacle and performance. The following provides a summary of the existing scholarship examining the intersection of theatre, war, and society.

### ***Theatrical Representations of War***

The most prominent framework for a war and society analysis of musical theatre is a chapter in musicologist Raymond Knapp's *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (2005).<sup>1</sup> In "Dealing with the Second World War," Knapp contends with the historical legacies of *The Sound of Music* and *Cabaret*, examining how the images presented on stage contribute to war memory and mythology. Methodologically, Knapp analyzes the lyrics, song form, plot, and staging to conclude what these shows have to say about war. In the chapter, Knapp's analysis claims *The Sound of Music* "constructs a pure, good, rural, folk-based, natural, victimized European nation" out of Austria that fits well into the "images of Europe that

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<sup>1</sup> It could be argued that this method was utilized before Knapp in Jeffrey W. Fenn's *Levitating The Pentagon: Evolutions in the American Theatre of the Vietnam War Era* (1992), which analyzes American theatre during and responding to the Vietnam War Era. Despite not engaging with Fenn's work, Knapp employs a similar methodology. For purposes of this project Knapp's work serves as a model, as he is one of the most influential musicologists in the field.

America already had in place.”<sup>2</sup> The musical creates a black and white narrative of “good, victim Austrians” and “evil, victimizer Nazis” that sanitizes Austrian history and removes much of the historical nuance surrounding the Anschluss.<sup>3</sup> It effectively runs counter to the historical reality that many Austrians favored the Anschluss and participated in the victimization of Jews and struggle against the Allied Powers during the war. Knapp also goes on to show how the musical *Cabaret*, in contrast, deliberately engages with antisemitism and the subsequent oppression and annihilation of Jewish peoples under the Third Reich, which other shows like *The Sound of Music* do not touch upon. He also argues that *Cabaret* was created more to “address issues of political violence during the civil rights movement of the 1960s” than to examine the legacies of Weimar Germany, the Nazi regime, totalitarianism, or the Second World War, making it effectively a Vietnam War-era musical.<sup>4</sup>

To draw these conclusions, Knapp focuses on the musical’s broad themes, while also narrowing his focus to particular songs, lyrics, or musical excerpts that support his larger conclusions. In studying war alongside history, Knapp pairs musical elements with historical analogs or references, such as *Cabaret*’s Kit Kat Klub having the same initials as the Klu Klux Klan, to highlight both the differences and blurring of history and its fictional representations.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Knapp argues certain songs in history musicals are reflective of larger historical trends, such as how popular German indifference to the rise of Nazism in Weimar is embodied in *Cabaret*’s song, “So What.”<sup>6</sup> Knapp affectively showcases history alongside these pieces of

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<sup>2</sup> Raymond Knapp, “Dealing with the Second World War,” in *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 229–30, accessed June 22, 2020, doi:10.2307/j.ctv39x6z2.14.

<sup>3</sup> Knapp, “Dealing with the Second World War,” 229–30.

<sup>4</sup> Knapp, “Dealing with the Second World War,” 240.

<sup>5</sup> Knapp, “Dealing with the Second World War,” 242.

<sup>6</sup> Knapp, “Dealing with the Second World War,” 244.

memory to highlight the discrepancies and how these shows have either made or broke myths surrounding the Second World War. Since this is only a single chapter in a larger book, the scope of the discussion is fairly limited, but Knapp suggests musicals for further consideration at the end of the text, including *South Pacific*, which this project explores. The method of analysis, as well as discussion on musical theatre in the context of war, history, and memory, has provided a strong foundation and framework of analysis for both this work and that of future scholars.

This research directly builds off of Knapp's work by applying the methodology in his war-based chapters within larger pieces on national identity into a war-focused study of several under-examined musicals in this research area. A number of the war-based musicals discussed in my research have been examined by other scholars under different lenses such as the construction of race and gender. However, the discussion of the wartime setting and historical context is often tangential to the scholarly discussion. Thus, this project endeavors to bring this seemingly disparate scholarship together by focusing on the thread that connects them all: war.

### ***Theatre Utilization in Wartime***

Outside of Knapp's work on war and musical theater, a number of other approaches emerge in the scholarly literature. One of these examines the connections between theatre, war, and society by analyzing how theatre is utilized during wartime. Several works of scholarship in this sector examine theatre during the Cold War period, including Bruce McConachie, *American Theater in the Culture of the Cold War: Producing and Contesting Containment, 1947–1962* (2003); Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination 1945–1961* (2003); and Christopher B. Balme and Berenika Szymanski-Düll, editors of the collection *Theatre, Globalization and the Cold War* (2017).

McConachie's work highlights how "spectatorial perceptions triggered by 'containment' organized much of the experience of [American] theatregoing" during the early Cold War, and is reflective of larger American culture.<sup>7</sup> Since Broadway was largely controlled by the elite business classes in the 1950s, theatre arguably was used to present and "unite 'the interests and ideologies'" or groups that constituted the bloc of the dominant culture.<sup>8</sup> This ideology was "containment liberalism" in which the United States endeavored to contain communism abroad, legitimize capitalism at home and abroad, and develop new methods for national security, including new agencies, covert operations, and propaganda.<sup>9</sup> On Broadway, containment liberalism was best reflected in allegory and usage of character archetypes such as passive, consuming "empty" men, tight-knit family circles, and powerful yet powerless heroes, all of which are evocative of the American populace's helplessness in the face of militarization and potential nuclear war.<sup>10</sup> For McConachie, the stage was a venue to reinforce, contest, and process containment ideology, and as most theatergoers were upper-middle class, many works served as confirmation bias for these themes.

Klein's *Cold War Orientalism* tackled similar Cold War texts to examine how American popular culture reflected United States public policy initiatives during the Cold War. After 1945, the United States focused its foreign policy attention on Asia and the Pacific regions as the area decolonized, which served as a new sphere of economic and cultural interest and needing to be won over to contain communism.<sup>11</sup> While the book is not solely focused on theatre and war,

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<sup>7</sup> Bruce McConachie, *American Theater in the Culture of the Cold War: Producing and Contesting Containment, 1947–1962*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2003), vii.

<sup>8</sup> McConachie, *American Theater in the Culture of the Cold War*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> McConachie, *American Theater in the Culture of the Cold War*, 9–15.

<sup>10</sup> McConachie, *American Theater in the Culture of the Cold War*, 52–3.

<sup>11</sup> Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 6, accessed February 17, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1ppx9k>.

Klein examines “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s trio of Oriental musicals” of the period, which she claims “ultimately linked the American presence in Asia to the story of Asian Americans at home.”<sup>12</sup> *South Pacific* (1947), *The King and I* (1951), and *Flower Drum Song* (1958) were centered around tolerance and friendship towards noncommunist Asian peoples, the Americanization of Asians at home, and also fit well into Edward Said’s model of Orientalism.<sup>13</sup> By packaging orientalist rhetoric and United States public policy goals in a heartfelt Rogers and Hammerstein production, Klein highlights how popular culture was an instrument of propagating Cold War ideology to audiences.

Scholarship on theatre as a forum for discussing Cold War ideology and globalization has also extended beyond America alone. The transnational collection *Theatre, Globalization and the Cold War* focuses on four major themes: internationally touring theatrical productions, institutional and governmental interest in theatre, the relationship between the artist and the state, and postcolonial issues.<sup>14</sup> During the Cold War, the United States and USSR funded theatre initiatives domestically and internationally, indicating that global powers were aware of theatre’s powers in not only disseminating ideology but also in “bridging or dissolving the political antagonisms of real politics.”<sup>15</sup> Due to this, the collection suggests that during the Cold War theatre became a battlefield as “theatres, groups, and even individual artists could stand in for a country, an ideology, a way of life— capitalist or Communist — both positively and negatively.”<sup>16</sup> Instead of looking just at how specific productions represent and disseminate ideology like former scholars, *Theatre, Globalization and the Cold War* additionally looks at the

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<sup>12</sup> Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 10–16.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher B. Balme and Berenika Szymanski-Düll, “Introduction,” in *Theatre, Globalization and the Cold War* (2017) ed. Christopher B. Balme and Berenika Szymanski-Düll, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Balme and Szymanski-Düll, “Introduction,” 18.

<sup>16</sup> Balme and Szymanski-Düll, “Introduction,” 5.

theatre in relation to structural, business, and governmental initiatives, demonstrating how theatre was utilized as an instrument of countries' policy during the Cold War.

All of these Cold War-related works highlight how theatre is oftentimes inextricably linked to wartime politics and can be harnessed to confirm ideological trends and push national agendas. More than just mere entertainment, McConachie highlights how theatre was a government-supported venue for supporting containment and the liberal consensus. Klein alternatively shows how America's new focus on Asia was paralleled in Rogers and Hammerstein's Oriental musicals which advocated both understanding and assimilation. Whereas Klein's and McConachie's work is American-centric, *Theatre, Globalization and the Cold War* highlights how theatre was also a weapon of Cold War ideology on the international and transnational level, as it was heavily utilized by both capitalist and communist nations. While all these works examine different ideologies or locales, they highlight how theatre can be harnessed to reflect on, respond to, and perpetuate trends in wartime thinking. Considering *South Pacific* was weaponized, as we will see, by the American military during the Korean War and larger Cold War, these works aptly document the larger phenomenon the case study falls within to inform this project's analysis.

### ***Applied Theatre***

Another sector of theatre and war scholarship focuses on applied theatre and how it is used in zones of conflict and serves to "mirror ... or undermine... military spectacles."<sup>17</sup> In recent years, theatre practitioners have traveled to current or former war zones such as Rwanda, Sri Lanka, and Kashmir to conduct social theatre projects to help survivors reconcile and make

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<sup>17</sup> Applied theatre is an umbrella term referring to theatre practiced with the intention of generating social change, such as prison theatre, disability theatre, and drama for development. James Thompson, Jenny Hughes, and Michael Balfour, *Performance in Place of War*, (London: Seagull, 2009), 3.

meaning out of the conflicts. The use of applied theater in war zones raises many issues and questions, as according to James Thompson, “constructing ‘meaningful’ narratives—giving dramatic structure to the painful experiences of war—can deny as much as it reveals.”<sup>18</sup> Applied theatre can both heal or hurt, meaning it is a practice that should not be deployed lightly. Practitioners are creating theater with those who have first-hand experience with war and violence. This form of theatre represents conflict differently than theatre about war by outsiders, but both types are valuable to understanding the intersection of performance, conflict, and war memory.

The first major documentation of this research area came out of a UK’s Arts and Humanities Research Council project helmed by James Thompson, Jenny Hughes, and Michael Balfour titled ‘In Place of War’ that was piloted from 2004-2007. The product of these social and applied theatre practitioners’ research was a book, *Performance in Place of War* (2009), and the larger global organization In Place of War. *Performance in Place of War* examines the use of theater in conflict areas, such as war zones, occupied cities, and refugee camps. Additionally, it focuses on how theater can help prevent war, heal and stabilize a community postwar, and is a way to remember and reconcile with past trauma.

Other scholars have built off this work, such as researcher Nandita Dinesh, author of *Theatre & War: Notes from the Field* (2016) and *Theatre & War: Notes from Afar* (2019). Dinesh has engaged in experimental theater in conflict zones, and her works serve as a guidebook for those interested in doing similar work. Instead of explaining the theory and practice that goes into theater-making in conflict zones in an outsider and academic manner such

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<sup>18</sup> James Thompson, “Digging up Stories: An Archaeology of Theatre in War.” *TDR* 48, no. 3 (2004): 150.



as the ‘In Place of War’ project, Dinesh writes an auto-ethnography utilizing self-reflection to highlight the experiences of the researcher-practitioner as well as the community in creating collaborative and reconciliatory theatre.<sup>19</sup> All these projects are testaments to the challenges and rewards of conducting social theatre as a means of peacebuilding and preserving war memory among conflict survivors.

Applied theater is one of many ways for survivors to come to terms with the impact of a conflict, such as a war or genocide, on their lives. Both *Performance in Place of War* and the *Theatre & War* books highlight how performance, guided by applied theater practitioners, can be a therapeutic process for individuals and communities alike and aid in helping to generate a collective memory of an event. For example, while not applied theatre per se, the creation and act of performing *Allegiance* was emotionally impactful for performers and audiences who had familial ties to the Japanese American incarceration experience. The musical has helped descendants better connect with family history and understand generational trauma, making applied theatre an apt point of comparison.

### ***Performance Studies Analyses: War as Performance and Spectacle***

Theatre and war as a field has recently contended with 21<sup>st</sup>-century conflicts through a performance studies lens, most notably in research by Sara Brady, Lindsey Mantoan, and Clare Finberg.<sup>20</sup> The work of these three scholars is united by the common theme that “performance is and has to be understood as a key to...militarization” and that conflicts, like theater, serve as

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<sup>19</sup> Autoethnography is qualitative research that uses one’s personal experience and reflection as data that can be connected to larger political, social, and cultural understandings. Nandita Dinesh, *Theatre & War: Notes from the Field*, (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2016), 3 and 9.

<sup>20</sup> Performance studies is an interdisciplinary field that studies the world through the lens of artistic and cultural performance (theatrical events, concerts, sporting events, etc.).

spectacle.<sup>21</sup> All these works present war and performance as a dichotomy. War both utilizes performance as a tool to alter the world and is a performance in and of itself. CUNY professor Sarah Brady is one of the pioneers in applying performance studies analyses to modern politics in her book *Performance, Politics, and the War on Terror: "Whatever it Takes"* (2012), in which she declares that "all politics is theatre."<sup>22</sup> Her book "chip[s] away at the in-between of politics and performance" and examines theatrical and performance events that "occur outside conventional theatre spaces" with a focus on post-9/11 America.<sup>23</sup> Brady highlights how performances are often a means to a political end, citing examples from the Bush and Obama administrations; the former to initiate the war on terror and the latter to offer hope and belief to Americans.<sup>24</sup> She also argues that performance can be a tool for performative activism or military recruitment, and can blur the lines between simulation and reality to desensitize a populace to violence or torture in media.<sup>25</sup> While not focused on conventional theatre, these political performances and simulations of reality are theatrical in nature and thus have affected how society has consumed the global war on terror, arguably assisting in further militarization of the American populace.

Brady extended her performance studies work by collaborating with Linfield University professor Lindsey Mantoan to co-edit *Performance in a Militarized Culture* (2017), an edited collection of works that examines how performance has been appropriated to further militarize society post-9/11 as well as used worldwide to both confront and confirm this process. Brady and

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<sup>21</sup> Sara Brady and Lindsey Mantoan, "Introduction: In the Absence of the Gun: Performing Militarization" in *Performance in a Militarized Culture* ed. Sara Brady and Lindsey Mantoan (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Sara Brady, *Performance, Politics, and the War on Terror: "Whatever It Takes,"* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), xiii.

<sup>23</sup> Brady, *Performance, Politics, and the War on Terror*, xvi and 4.

<sup>24</sup> Brady, *Performance, Politics, and the War on Terror*, xvi.

<sup>25</sup> Brady, *Performance, Politics, and the War on Terror*, xvi.

Mantoan argue that this phenomenon warrants study as “we are not born militarized, but through performances we repeat daily, we become militarized through a slow process.”<sup>26</sup> The collection focuses on four major themes: how places such as refugee camps and military bases contend with militarization’s effects; how past wars affect present performance; how civilians and military personnel perform as soldiers; and how everyday life has become militarized. The collection has a broad scope that focuses on aspects as large as historical memory and as small as the individual soldier to help readers better understand just how inextricably linked performance and society are today.

Mantoan also produced a monograph on the subject of performance, theatre, and conflicts. *War as Performance: Conflicts in Iraq and Political Theatricality* (2018) narrows the scope from modern warfare down to the Iraq War. Mantoan highlights how technology has made modern wars more impersonal than former conflicts and with it has come both the militarization of civilians and conflict displays such as violent performances of terrorism.<sup>27</sup> Mantoan argues that the Iraq War was “performative, which is to say that [it] uniquely combine[s] political theater, censorship, propaganda and spectacle ... as a part of combat and media operations.”<sup>28</sup> Her research shows that unlike conflicts such as the Vietnam War, the Iraq War did not cause an “aesthetic revolution,” although it fostered a reemergence of Greek Tragedy and documentary theatre as a means to contend with the American and Iraqi experience of the war.<sup>29</sup> Due to this, the Iraq War was the basis of several works that condemn perpetual war and contend with its

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<sup>26</sup> Brady and Mantoan, “Introduction,” 3.

<sup>27</sup> Lindsey Mantoan, *War as Performance: Conflicts in Iraq and Political Theatricality*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 2.

<sup>28</sup> Mantoan, *War as Performance*, 2

<sup>29</sup> Mantoan, *War as Performance*, 6–9.

effects on veterans.<sup>30</sup> Thus, performance has worked to distance itself from military appropriation that serves further violence.

An additional performance studies analysis of recent conflicts is Clare Finberg's *Watching War on the Twenty-First Century Stage: Spectacles of Conflict* (2017), which centers around the idea that war and its facets, such as soldiers, or associations, like terrorism, are "represented and disseminated as spectacles that are intended to win victories."<sup>31</sup> Focusing her work on British theatre, Finberg examines how the spectacle of war is inherently theatrical, which dramatists have taken advantage of to represent and critique modern war on the stage. An example of this analysis is Finberg's discussion of Tim Robbins' *Embedded* (2004), a satiric play about embedded journalists in Iraq to expose and critique the "correlation between the spectacles of conflict and the commercialization of the media."<sup>32</sup> Theatre such as this, while being performance itself, can point to how the theatricality of modern wars and terrorism are exploited and weaponized by the media and military to garner support. It alternatively also encourages the spectacle of war to be deweaponized through informed observation, debate, and critique.

Each of these performance studies works examine war both as performative and performance to better analyze the intersection between war, performance, politics, and militarization in 21<sup>st</sup>-century conflicts and society Brady's work, individually and in the edited collection, highlights how society has become increasingly militarized in the aftermath of 9/11 and examine how performance, such as political speeches and live theatre, reflect this trend. On a similar note, both Mantoan and Finberg examine how theatre has also been used to both contest

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<sup>30</sup> Mantoan, *War as Performance*, 6–9.

<sup>31</sup> Clare Finberg, *Watching War on the Twenty-First Century Stage: Spectacles of Conflict*, (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017), 13.

<sup>32</sup> Finberg, *Watching War on the Twenty-First Century Stage*, 26.

and come to terms with our wars in the Middle East. While this project doesn't directly employ performance studies analyses, the idea that war is a performance and spectacle is an important consideration. Arguably, this also just isn't a 21<sup>st</sup>-century phenomenon as 20<sup>th</sup>-century pieces like *South Pacific* and *Miss Saigon* use theatrical performance to support or resist militarization. Similarly, many people associate *Miss Saigon* with the recreation of the Fall of Saigon and the helicopter appearing onstage, more so than the plot itself, highlighting the persistence and impact of staging war as a romantic spectacle.

## **Chapter II – *South Pacific*: The Good War’s Golden Age (1940s–1950s)**

America’s 1940s and 1950s were defined by the nation’s engagement and victory in the Second World War. In the aftermath, the United States became a leader on the international stage and a bulwark against the spread of communism. The nation tried to assert its moral dominance in the heat of the Cold War, despite not practicing some of the values that it preached as evidenced by the Jim Crow laws in the American South. America felt a sense of pride in the righteous victory claimed in the Second World War, a product of battlefield and home front achievements. In the decades since, World War II has been conflated with a similar sense of pride and romanticism through the cultural myth known as the ‘Good War.’ Musical theatre, like other media and the arts, did its part in the postwar years to celebrate America’s moral high ground and uphold pride in militarism by representing the Second World War in such a light. The three musicals that have had a heavy hand in forming the myth of the ‘Good War’ are *On the Town* (Leonard Bernstein, Betty Comden, Adolph Green, 1944), *South Pacific* (Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein II, Joshua Logan, 1949), and *The Sound of Music* (Richard Rodgers, Oscar Hammerstein, Howard Lindsay, Russel Crouse, 1959).

The construction of the ‘Good War’ myth was popularized by historian Michael C.C. Adams in his groundbreaking book, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II*. Pulling back the veil, Adams challenges the notion of the “war years as a golden age” and claims that this myth is “destructive” to future generations and has poorly served the war generations as well.<sup>1</sup> World War II, in many ways, was the last clear-cut war. Whereas more recent conflicts in Vietnam and the Middle East were ultimately divisive and the rationale for being involved

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<sup>1</sup> Michael C.C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), xiv.

abroad became challenged, World War II retrospectively has a black-and-white sense of morality and duty to it. The Allies were the ‘good guys’ and the fascist Axis Powers were the ‘bad guys.’ The Axis Powers “bullied the weak” and almost beat them into submission, until the United States helped end the war and emerge as a “strong, united, prosperous” nation that functioned as the “unrivaled and admired leader of the free world.”<sup>2</sup>

As Adams claims, the myth has some truth to it, as America came out of the Great Depression and the war itself with fewer casualties and a higher standard of living than other nations. The United States had a clear reason to see the Axis Powers as a global threat and fought them away from American soil, insulating the nation from home front attacks like the strategic air bombings and occupations in Europe and the Pacific.<sup>3</sup> Yet this myth “leaves out...questionable aspects while exaggerating the good things” such as heroism, and ignores war crimes and wrongdoings committed against the enemy, including indiscriminate killings or the incarceration of Japanese-Americans.<sup>4</sup> This inconclusive national myth “think[s] of the war not as it was but as it should have been,” only serving to further blur the line between memory and history.<sup>5</sup>

The *real* Second World War was markedly brutal on all fronts; it saw high numbers of enemy civilian casualties and rampant xenophobia spread through propaganda that fostered more violence. Additionally, Americans were unfamiliar with the foreign geography and diseases of the Pacific, contributing to horrific wartime experiences in the region. Wartime service left swaths of combatants with forms of post-traumatic stress, revealing how World War II was not

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<sup>2</sup> Adams, *The Best War Ever*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Adams, *The Best War Ever*, 6.

<sup>4</sup> Adams, *The Best War Ever*, 7.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth D. Rose, *Myth, and the Greatest Generation: A Social History of Americans in World War II* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 3.

the sanitized conflict it is often mythologized to be. This phenomenon did not just manifest in the postwar years, as even during the war “people at home were kept in innocence of malaria, dysentery, terror, bad attitude, and ‘psychoneurosis’” to keep up morale. To guarantee civilian support, imagery of the ‘real war’ needed to be kept away from people on the home front. Historian Paul Fussell attributes the postwar glorification partially to the fact that, unlike its Western European Allies, the American home front was not bombed, and civilians did not directly witness the war’s horrors.<sup>6</sup> As opposed to occurrences like the London Blitz and bombing of Dresden in Europe, Americans were far removed from combat and its crossfire, enabling them to better process the war. The clear distinction between the civilian and military experience in terms of facing war trauma has made “the meaning of the war seem...inaccessible” to Americans at large.<sup>7</sup> This distance meant that the “national reality” was still far from “public maturity” in acknowledging the true meaning of the Second World War, allowing romanticism to run rampant.<sup>8</sup>

The musicals from this period that helped build this myth (*On the Town*, *South Pacific*, and *The Sound of Music*) all emerged within fifteen years after the war and were created by people and viewed by audiences who, in one way or another, were personally impacted by World War II. The shows’ creators and their initial audiences did not have the advantage of historical retrospective and reflection on the war. Thus, these shows were closely tied to people who experienced the war as personal memory and current event as opposed to distant and impersonal

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 268.

<sup>7</sup> Fussell, *Wartime*, 268.

<sup>8</sup> Fussell, *Wartime*, 268.



history. Where these musicals are located temporally brings them closer to the perceived myths and memory of this period and further away from historical accuracy.

Out of the three musicals, *On the Town* is the only one to have premiered on Broadway during the war itself. While the musical is not at all about the experience of combat in the Second World War, its premise still generates romanticism and nostalgia for the period. Set in 1944, *On the Town* is a musical comedy about the “energetic but also inevitable poignant scenario” of three American sailors on shore leave for twenty-four hours in New York City.<sup>9</sup> As musicologist Katherine Baber notes, the show, like other entertainment at the time, served as “both a diversion and targeted statement of American identity” for audiences who saw the show when it originally premiered.<sup>10</sup> *On the Town* was also seen by its creators as “their own contribution to the war effort.”<sup>11</sup> Similar to what *South Pacific* would later do, the show barely mentions the war and instead serves as an escapist love letter to Manhattan. The heavy focus on military camaraderie and sex in the piece fosters a nostalgia for the ‘good times’ that happened during the war, as opposed to confronting what the three sailors experienced during their service outside of those twenty-four hours. The fact the show came out during the war potentially accounts for this, as questioning the war and discussing trauma would likely have been problematic commercially and socially, and the musical would be viewed as a blow to morale instead of a harbinger of it. Due to this, it is important to acknowledge *On the Town*’s place as an influential piece of war memory that further romanticizes the Second World War experience.

Ten years after their first World War II hit *South Pacific*, Rodgers and Hammerstein

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<sup>9</sup> Katherine Baber, “‘Manhattan Women’: Jazz, Blues, and Gender in *On the Town* and *Wonderful Town*,” *American Music* 31, no. 1 (2013): 89, accessed June 24, 2020, doi:10.5406/americanmusic.31.1.0073.

<sup>10</sup> Baber, “Manhattan Women,” 89.

<sup>11</sup> Baber, “Manhattan Women,” 89.

brought *The Sound of Music* to the stage, which takes place in the rustic hills and country estates of Salzburg, Austria in the late 1930s, and details the romance between a widower and military man Captain von Trapp and a novice nun Maria, who serves as a governess for his children. Based on Maria von Trapp's memoirs *The Story of the Trapp Family Singers*, the musical follows the events leading up to the family's flight from Austria after the Anschluss when the nation was annexed into the Third Reich in 1938. Musicologist Raymond Knapp argues the musical "constructs a pure, good, rural, folk-based, natural, *victimized* European nation" out of Austria that fits well into the "images of Europe that America already had in place."<sup>12</sup> These images are only reinforced by the dichotomy between Captain von Trapp and the "wholesome, fundamentally good 'soul of Austria' he stands for and the insidious, backstabbing Nazis like Rolf who 'Austria cannot be saved from.'"<sup>13</sup> The black and white narrative of 'good, victim Austrians' and 'evil, victimizer Nazis' sanitizes the period's history and removes much of the historical nuance surrounding the Anschluss. Instead of the historical morally grey situation of Austrian responsibility and victimization, *The Sound of Music*'s Austria fits nicely into a narrative where the nation is portrayed as the "first victim in Germany's march to hell."<sup>14</sup> This runs counter to the historical reality that many Austrians favored the Anschluss and participated in the victimization of Jews and struggle against the Allied Powers during the war. Mentions of or allusions to the Holocaust or the "ruthless racial persecution and future war-making" that socialized Third Reich citizens toward genocide are notably absent from a piece regarding the rise of Nazism in Austria.<sup>15</sup> Such allusions would not appear until the musical *Cabaret* in the

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<sup>12</sup> Raymond Knapp, "Dealing with the Second World War," in *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 229–30, accessed June 22, 2020, doi:10.2307/j.ctv39x6z2.14.

<sup>13</sup> Knapp, "Dealing with the Second World War," 231.

<sup>14</sup> Knapp, "Dealing with the Second World War," 232.

<sup>15</sup> Knapp, "Dealing with the Second World War," 231.

1960s made the divisiveness and brutalities of antisemitism in Weimar Germany a major plot point.

*The Sound of Music* not only simplifies complicated elements of history but also feeds into the myth of American exceptionalism and heroism during the Second World War. In the end, the von Trapps escape to the United States and become an international musical sensation, speaking to “the promise of America, its groundedness, and its role within postwar America” as a “refuge from tyranny.”<sup>16</sup> The von Trapps are effectively analogs for the good people of Europe that the United States went to protect, redeem, and liberate in the European Theater of the war. Despite the horrors that nationalism, appeasement, and the Treaty of Versailles brought about in the form of World War II, there is a steadfast notion that there is “Something Good” left in Europe that is worth redeeming. In comparison to more muddy and controversial American wars like Vietnam, World War II’s moral imperative for America to help poor victims and defeat the clearly defined evil, the fascist Axis Powers, made the ‘Good War’ good, and *On the Town* and *The Sound of Music* give further credence to this myth. However, the show that has the most responsibility for fostered this myth takes audiences to the beautiful and exotic Solomon Islands during the height of the Pacific Theater in Rogers and Hammerstein’s *South Pacific*.

### ***Case Study: Rogers and Hammerstein’s South Pacific (1949)***

Based on the 1947 short story collection *Tales of the South Pacific* by James A. Michener, the plot of the musical *South Pacific* revolves around two sets of romances on islands in this geographic region during the Second World War.<sup>17</sup> The primary plot follows a naïve

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<sup>16</sup> Knapp, “Dealing with the Second World War,” 233.

<sup>17</sup> This chapter’s case study on *South Pacific* is directly drawn from my undergraduate thesis. For further reading see: Leana Sottile, “Desegregation Through Entertainment: Rodgers and Hammerstein’s *South Pacific* as an Instrument of Military Policy,” *Voces Novae*, Vol. 12, Article 6, <https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/vocesnovae/vol12/iss1/6>.

Alabaman nurse, Nellie Forbush, who falls in love with Emile de Becque, a French expatriate plantation owner. Played by Mary Martin and Ezio Pinza in the original Broadway production, the couple's main obstacle is that Nellie cannot accept de Becque's mixed-race children with a Polynesian woman. After Emile leaves for a scouting mission to prepare for Operation Alligator near the end of the show, Nellie realizes the folly of her racial prejudice but believes it is too late when she expects he has perished on the mission. Instead of leaving the island to support the next offensive, Nellie stays to care for Emile's children, and is thrilled when he returns, alive and well. The second romantic plot concerns Lieutenant Joe Cable, USMC, who is in love with Liat, a beautiful Tonkinese islander. He has doubts about how his family and greater society will react to him marrying an Asian woman due to deep-seated racism. Joe decides to stay on Bali'hai and away from American prejudice after the war, but he is killed in action during the scouting mission with Emile on a Japanese-held island. The show's side-plots follow the United States Naval Construction Battalion Members, or Seabees, in their comedic island misadventures before they, too, go off to battle on Operation Alligator.

It is important to note that while the United States Armed Forces did not fund or push for the creation of the book *Tales of the South Pacific* or the musical *South Pacific* in any way, two of its most important creators, James A. Michener and Joshua Logan, were both military men. Michener, the author of *Tales of the South Pacific*, served as a Lieutenant Commander of the United States Naval Reserve in the South Pacific areas during the Second World War; his experiences inspired him to write the short story collection. Although he was not stationed in the Pacific Theater, Joshua Logan, the show's director and co-librettist with Oscar Hammerstein II, was a US Army Captain serving as an intelligence and public relations officer. Logan also

directed several shows for the soldiers near the front lines, including Irving Berlin's *This is the Army*.

Michener and Logan men spent their formative years in the American military, which adds layers of authenticity to the piece that might have been lost in translation. Oscar Hammerstein II, by contrast, was not a military man. "He found it difficult to write military speech and slang," and without Logan's assistance, the play might have looked a lot different, as he dictated all the scenes that had to do with the military.<sup>18</sup> That being said, Michener's book established the nuances of service in the armed forces, and the worst horrors of warfare in some of the stories were not adapted in the musical. As opposed to leaning into more realistic accounts of the war, the musical instead writes out some of Michener's criticisms of the military and war and opts for romantic escapism. Additionally, while neither Rodgers nor Hammerstein served in the military, each still did their part in supporting the war effort, such as providing tickets to servicemen to *Oklahoma!*<sup>19</sup> The latter show was also used to entertain American troops in the Pacific Theater with one of their international companies' USO units in 1945, and *South Pacific* would do the same during the Korean War.<sup>20</sup>

*South Pacific* was considered a critical and box office success.<sup>21</sup> The original run of the show from April 7, 1949, to January 16, 1954, went for a total of 1925 performances at New

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<sup>18</sup> [Draft of Interview Answers for 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, Box 125, Folder 9], Joshua Logan Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>19</sup> The company provided a limited number of complimentary tickets, cheap standing room only tickets, and cheap-rate matinees for service members in New York (Tim Carter, *Oklahoma!: The Making of an American Musical* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008], 149).

<sup>20</sup> Ann Sears, "The Coming of the Musical Play: Rodgers and Hammerstein" in *The Cambridge Companion to the Musical*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 150.; [Letter to John Fearnley from Ross Bowman, September 4, 1951, Box 50-52], Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>21</sup> Throughout the original run of the production and the filming of the 1958 movie, the musical was mentioned almost daily in sources like the *New York Herald Tribune*, *New York Times*, *New York Post*, and *Variety*. It was the subject of rave reviews and the actors received paparazzi-like coverage. [Letter to Oscar Hammerstein II from Mrs. Joseph C. Marody, December 20, 1949, Box 50-52], Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

York's Majestic Theatre.<sup>22</sup> The musical also received nine Tony Awards in 1950 and the 1950 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. It also has been adapted for the screen twice, in 1958 and 2001, was revived on West End twice in 1988 and 2001, and on Broadway once in 2008, staged at Lincoln Center in New York City.<sup>23</sup>

More than just another musical on Broadway, *South Pacific* was a national and international phenomenon, making it an apt musical to examine. Instead of grappling with wartime realities and examining the rough interplay of war, myth, and memory, the show fosters the image of World War II as a nostalgic 'Good War,' an image that would become a pervasive part of in postwar military and popular entertainment. As a piece of morale-building, military-supporting theatrical entertainment it was a soft power to socialize the military towards racial tolerance that conversely reinforced harmful racist caricatures and stereotypes of Asians to further other them in American media.

### ***Mythologizing the War in the Pacific***

Let's leap to a conclusion at the outset and establish the fact that neither the play nor the movie version of "South Pacific" was ever meant to be a documentary on what happened in those latitudes during World War II.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> "South Pacific," *Playbill*, New York City, New York, accessed April 20, 2020, [https://www.playbill.com/production/south-pacific-majestic-theatre-vault-0000007854\\_](https://www.playbill.com/production/south-pacific-majestic-theatre-vault-0000007854_)

<sup>23</sup> The 1958 film was directed by Joshua Logan, starred Mitzi Gaynor and Rossano Brazzi, and was distributed by Twentieth Century Fox Productions. The 2001 TV movie adaptation was directed by Richard Pearce, starred Glenn Close and Harry Connick Jr., and was distributed by the American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). On West End, the Prince of Wales Theatre's 1988 revival was directed by Roger Redfern and starred Gemma Craven and Emile Belcourt, and the Olivier Theatre's 2001 production was directed by Trevor Dunn and starred Lauren Kennedy and Philip Quast. The 2008 production at Lincoln Center's Vivian Beaumont Theater was directed by Bartlett Sher and starred Kelli O'Hara and Paulo Szot. This production was the subject of rave reviews, played 996 regular performances from April 3, 2008, to August 22, 2010, and received seven Tony Awards. There was an additional revival at Lincoln Center in 1967, directed by Joe Layton and starring Florence Henderson and Giorgio Tozzi, but many do not consider it an official Broadway revival. The show has also seen two United States national tours, in 1950 and 2009, and one in the United Kingdom in 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Frank Farrell, "Premiere of Emotions," *New York World-Telegram and Sun*, March 20, 1958.

The military approved of *South Pacific* because it mythologized World War II. The play underwent several revisions, and with every version, its narrative moved further away from the historical truth about soldiers' experiences in the Pacific Theater. While the creators sought to make *South Pacific* as accurate as possible, the musical is still a piece of Second World War memory and historical fiction several degrees separated from historical fact. The work started as memories and oral histories that were turned into a fictional short story collection by James A. Michener, which was reshaped by the edits of the Macmillan Publishing company. Next, it was then selectively adapted into a musical play, and finally was performed on stage by the show's company led by a director's vision. These gaps between each of the multiple degrees of separation are where losses in translation occur, turning actual history and primary source accounts into romanticized, nostalgia-filled fiction.

Historians have shown that for American armed forces the Pacific War was much more brutal and savage than the war in Europe. Also, the Pacific Theater was, in large part, a race war. As opposed to the European fronts where people were fighting people of similar heritage, languages, and ancestral places of origin, the Americans fighting on the Pacific front saw themselves radically different from the Japanese they were fighting. Due to the differences in language, culture, race, etc., it became easier for Americans to 'pseudo-speciate' the Japanese people as a subhuman menace, which was reinforced through rhetoric, propaganda, and the media.<sup>25</sup> Due to the dehumanization of the enemy, savagery in warfare was easier to justify and carry out without hesitation. This alien nature of the enemy was accompanied by challenges of geography, climate, and prevailing diseases mentioned earlier. Compared to the urban and rural

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<sup>25</sup> John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 1–14.

land war in Europe, the Pacific Theater was characterized by island hopping and subtropical environments that needed to be mastered to defeat the Japanese.<sup>26</sup> In conjunction with the idea of a race war to destroy an alien enemy, American soldiers attacked the environment with weapons designed to wipe out soldiers, civilians, and nature alike, with a backdrop of modern industrial warfare.

*South Pacific* is effectively silent on the brutality of World War II as a whole, and even more notably, in the Pacific Theater, where the show takes place. The lack of military action and wartime brutality in the show finds expression in the fact that it takes place in the war's rear areas and most of the featured ensemble military personnel are either nurses or members of United States Naval Construction Battalions, or Seabees.<sup>27</sup> In this regard, the play accurately portrays non-combatants, but by focusing mostly on these groups, it distracts the audience from the far more brutal history of the war. More akin to a daily job than a traditional military role, these men watched movies, drank Cokes, and explored the islands they were stationed on when not on duty, a luxury not afforded to most combatants.<sup>28</sup> Due to the rear's routine lifestyle, non-combat and military support personnel have largely been sidelined in the World War II narrative as they do not depict the tales of heroism and valor that help "sell" war, such as combat

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<sup>26</sup> The Allies utilized the military strategy of island hopping in the Pacific Theater, which entailed the assumption of control and establishment of a base on a key island, and then using that island as a launching point to take over another island, and so on. This allowed the Allies to move defended areas of control closer to the Japanese mainland and work to help blockade Japan by cutting off their supply lines.

<sup>27</sup> During World War II, United States Naval Construction Battalions, or Seabees were groups of militarized construction workers who built advanced base developments largely in Pacific warzones. Recruited from the Civil Engineer Corps and construction laborers, Seabees received military training and constructed over four hundred bases during the war. "Seabee History: Formation of the Seabees and World War II," Naval History and Heritage Command, US Navy, Washington, DC, accessed April 4, 2020, <https://www.history.navy.mil/research/library/online-reading-room/title-list-alphabetically/h/history-of-seabees/ww2.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Harman, "The Coney Island of the South Pacific," *Visions and Revisions* 1 (June 2017): 10–12, <http://visionsandrevisions.cs.edinboro.edu/index.php/visions/article/view/1>.



memoirs.<sup>29</sup> Most of the characters in *South Pacific* appear to experience this relaxed side of the war, as opposed to physical combat, so the musical provides popular culture representation for these wartime experiences. However, this does not excuse the silence on wartime savagery within those sectors of the play that deal with combatants.

By primarily presenting service experiences not traditionally seen as heroic, it avoids the complete picture of wartime service in the Pacific, therefore *South Pacific*'s depiction leaves much to be desired. The benign depiction of wartime service finds expression in the musical's comedic moments, such as when Bloody Mary, a Tonkinese woman, is stirring up economic troubles on the island by paying the islanders to make grass skirts to sell to military personnel instead of working for the French plantation owners, who are helping serve the war effort. In the scene, Seabee Luther Billis reveals the Seabees are making the skirts so that the islanders can return to their farm work, which appalls the island's commanding officers. Instead of highlighting physical construction work and hard labor these men would be performing as part of their service, they are portrayed making kitschy island paraphernalia like grass skirts and poorly made shrunken heads out of oranges. While these men would have had free time, the fact they are spending it so ridiculously makes a mockery of them for nostalgic and comedic purposes, which further distances the show from the realities of the Pacific Theater.

*South Pacific* correctly illustrates the idea that war is oftentimes large periods of inaction with bursts of action. Yet the musical takes this to an extreme and relegates combat to a very minor role, poorly serving historical accuracy and helping to further mythologize the war. The

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<sup>29</sup> The other notable piece of media depicting Seabees is the 1944 film, *The Fighting Seabees*, which was directed by Edward Ludwig, starred John Wayne and Susan Hayward and was distributed by Republic Pictures. It fictionalized the story of how the Seabees came to be and, as it came out during the war, exhibited gratuitous patriotism and anti-Japanese sentiment.

whole musical builds up to a single military operation, a fictitious Operation Alligator, but one of the most striking elements in *South Pacific* is that for a play that centers around the Second World War any combat action happens off-stage. All information given about wartime operations is relayed through radio messages and mission briefings on base. Lieutenant Cable dies in combat but off-stage, downplaying the emotional and plot impact of his passing on audiences.<sup>30</sup> Instead of seeing him die, audiences only hear about it in passing, which effectively silences the toll of death in a time of war. The play also ends with the naval forces stationed on the island awaiting transport in battle uniform, indicating there is fighting still to be done.

While *South Pacific* has issues of representation in some areas, the musical gives credit where it's due by showcasing the women who served as nurses during the Second World War. During World War II, while many women served in munitions jobs and helped support the war effort on the home front, one of the other ways women got actively involved was through the Army Nurse Corps (ANC). This reinforced the popular and prevailing stereotype that women were meant to be the caretakers while men were meant to be soldiers. Due to this, nursing remained a very gendered profession and thus the ANC sought to keep men out of the picture as nurses, who were largely young, unmarried, female, white recruits.<sup>31</sup> The ANC served in both the European and Pacific Theatres and worked almost non-stop, boosting morale as well as serving the medical needs of soldiers and sailors alike.<sup>32</sup> *South Pacific*'s nurse characters are cookie-cutter versions of the young, white, female, unmarried, image that the ANC perpetuated.

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<sup>30</sup> Hammerstein and Logan, *South Pacific*, 87.

<sup>31</sup> Barbara Brooks Tomblin, *G.I. Nightingales: The Army Nurse Corps in World War II* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 10, accessed April 21, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jctds](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2jctds); Charissa J. Threat, *Nursing Civil Rights: Gender and Race in the Army Nurse Corps* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 2–6, 24, accessed April 21, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt13x1ks4.5](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5406/j.ctt13x1ks4.5).

<sup>32</sup> Tomblin, *G.I. Nightingales*, 10; Threat, *Nursing Civil Rights*, 2–6, 24.

The ANC's model nurse is fully realized in the main female lead Nellie Forbush, a self-proclaimed cockeyed optimist who works tirelessly towards the morale of the Armed Forces. When Nellie is first introduced, in the song "A Cockeyed Optimist," she proclaims that while people believe with the war that "[Allied Forces are] done and [they] might as well be dead," she "can't get it into [her] head" because she is full of hope and optimism.<sup>33</sup> Rather than seeing obstacles in the situations around her, Nellie believes that the Allies can and will persevere through the hardships of war and that nothing can hold her back. By making Nellie a patriotic beacon of light in wartime, Rodgers and Hammerstein underscore the qualities that make Nellie an ANC nurse.

Nellie's can-do attitude is also paired with her devotion to military morale, as the Master of Ceremonies and one of the organizers for the island's 'Thanksgiving Follies' revue for the troops. Nellie helps announce the performance to the GI audience and performs "Honeybun," one of the most notable numbers in the musical for Mary Martin's performance in a drag sailor's outfit. One Pacific Theater veteran who later attended the show, Richard M. Young, wrote to Martin that her performance as Nellie was "the kind of girl that [they] all dreamed of and thought about" during the war, and how she "[was] America, [she was] home."<sup>34</sup> Nellie represents the woman the veterans returned home to, serving when her country needed her but returning to the private, domestic sphere post-war. Nellie similarly takes this journey, starting as a model nurse and by the end of the show forgoes joining her fellow nurses for Operation Alligator and transitions to the model mother of Emile's children and woman of the plantation house. Nellie is

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<sup>33</sup> Hammerstein and Logan, "South Pacific," 6.

<sup>34</sup> [Letter to Mary Martin from Richard M. Young, Box 50], Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

a model nurse that represents exactly what an ANC nurse was meant to be and is a snapshot of the period's idealized woman.

*South Pacific* both idealizes the service members themselves and glamorizes the relationship between the American Armed Forces and the populations on the islands where the military was stationed to reinforce a colonialist mindset. During the war, island populations helped the armed forces on both sides of the war. Some sought to free themselves from colonial rule and saw Japanese victories as an inspiration that other Asian populations could stand up to the white colonizers. Some sympathized with the Japanese despite their harsh occupation regime, while others such as Filipinos helped the Allied causes through combat, shipbuilding, agriculture.<sup>35</sup> In the Solomon Islands where *South Pacific* is set, the Allies recruited islanders to serve in a labor corps and had contact with people they otherwise would have been segregated from during colonial rule. Additionally, people's engagement with American goods and values of egalitarianism inspired people to want self-rule post-war, which would not become a reality until 1978.<sup>36</sup>

In the play, more focus is placed on the enlistment of the colonial forces on the island, as opposed to the colonized who are relegated to a minor role. Colonel Brackett enlists Emile in the dangerous operation to go on a scouting mission with Lieutenant Cable and help "turn...the tide of the war in their area."<sup>37</sup> Brackett's proposal is an example of the United States Armed Forces working with the local if non-native population during the war and recruiting them for help.

While Emile is a Frenchman and not a Polynesian, his involvement is still an example of how the

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<sup>35</sup> Gary Y. Okihiro, *American History Unbound: Asians and Pacific Islanders* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2015), 356–7, accessed April 20, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctv1wxqh8](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctv1wxqh8).

<sup>36</sup> Ralph R. Premdas, "The Solomon Islands: Independence and Political Change / Les Iles Salomon: Independance et Changement Politique," *Civilisations* 33, no. 2 (1983): 230–1, [www.jstor.org/stable/41803069](http://www.jstor.org/stable/41803069).

<sup>37</sup> Hammerstein and Logan, "South Pacific," 46.

war fostered globalization and often became integrated into local societies. The indigenous populations in the show, however, are largely dissociated from the war effort and are presented as people that are of service to or cause trouble in colonial society. The show has a “French colonialist presence...apparent” throughout, which is emphasized by the use of the French language by all of the local peoples, except for Bloody Mary, who is one of the show’s anticolonial models.<sup>38</sup> Henry, Emile’s French-speaking native servant, has no agency within the play and is only there to serve the de Becque family of the plantation house, making him an example of a ‘civilized’ Pacific Islander who has acclimated to colonial society. He serves as a contrast to Bloody Mary, who constantly comments on how the “French planters [are] stingy bastards” and stirs up trouble to get the islanders to work for her by making island paraphernalia for service members to bring home instead of their farm work.<sup>39</sup> While the island politics are treated largely as comedic moments, there is a clear expectation that the Western plantation owners and their tenants will be helping support the US military presence on the island, and the Asian natives who disrupt this process are trespassing on Navy property.

With its distorted portrayals of characters and setting, the show effectively glamorizes service in the Pacific Theater to an unrealistic extent. From the start of the show, there is a visual emphasis on the tropical, exotic, escapist nature of the play’s setting in a world painted with the colors of the “purple bougainvillea, flaming hibiscus, and the yellow and white blossoms of the frangipani.”<sup>40</sup> The show’s overtly gorgeous tropical setting and the allure of the beauty of Bali’hai is not only an escape for the audience and serves as one for the servicemen who believe “There ain’t a thing wrong with any man here, That can’t be cured by putting him near a girly,

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<sup>38</sup> Jim Lovensheimer, *South Pacific: Paradise Rewritten* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 176.

<sup>39</sup> Hammerstein and Logan, “South Pacific,” 21, 25.

<sup>40</sup> Hammerstein and Logan, “South Pacific,” 4.

womanly, female, feminine, DAME!”<sup>41</sup> While many men facing diseases like malaria, and coping with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and fatal injuries probably would not agree with this sentiment, the song “There Is Nothing Like a Dame” serves to downplay the war’s real horrors, for a comedic song on the struggles of not having easily accessible women for carnal purposes.

One of the most significant ways *South Pacific* serves to generate nostalgia is in the scenes at the top of Act II for the island’s ‘Thanksgiving Follies’ performance for the troops, evocative of the Soldier Shows and amateur theatrical performances put on by service personnel for service personnel. These shows had “inestimable therapeutic effect value” for both the audiences and participants and were different from the professional Camp Shows organized by the United Service Organizations (USO).<sup>42</sup> Extremely amateur, the revue in *South Pacific* is costumed in rope, newspapers, and comic books, the GIs in attendance are sitting on ammunition boxes and are struggling with problems like people forgetting to put gas in the generator to power the show.<sup>43</sup> However, as Colonel Brackett claims, “It’s things...like this show tonight that keep [them] going” especially as the Allies are “having the hell beat out of [them] in two hemispheres.”<sup>44</sup> The revue serves as a way to uphold morale until things take a turn for the better and foster a sense of hope and community among the service members, nurses, and locals on the island as they try to make themselves a temporary home before the Americans can return to the United States. The scene serves to remember the entertainment experiences of war while also

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<sup>41</sup> Hammerstein and Logan, “South Pacific,” 20.

<sup>42</sup> Lowell Matson, “Theatre for the Armed Forces in World War II,” in *Educational Theatre Journal* 6, no. 1 (1954), 5–7, accessed April 21, 2020. doi:10.2307/3204158.

<sup>43</sup> Hammerstein and Logan, “South Pacific,” 62–65, 70.

<sup>44</sup> Hammerstein and Logan, “South Pacific,” 70

celebrating the perseverance of the spirit and sense of fraternity that came with American military service during the Second World War.

Additionally, in scenes where characters discuss the war, hardships are mentioned but usually off-handedly. When Lieutenant Cable arrives on base on the directive from his Marine commanding officers, all of the Seabees whistle and are intrigued to hear that he's been "up where they use real bullets."<sup>45</sup> While the dialogue downplays that there is fighting going on in nearby areas of the Pacific, the exact nature of this is never discussed in-depth and is instead glossed over to usher in a comedic scene, where there could have been more emotional depth. For example, in the second act, Lieutenant Cable is revealed to have contracted malaria on the island of Bali'Hai and has been hospitalized for it.<sup>46</sup> Instead of him taking the illness seriously, he leaves the hospital without being discharged to get back over to Bali'Hai to be with Liat. While he is chastised, it poses no lasting impact on his military record beyond a few lines in the show.<sup>47</sup> The show's mentions of combat and disease acknowledge that there are more grisly things going on, but not enough so that it detracts from the show's major romantic themes and comedic subplots.

The song "My Girl Back Home" which was omitted from the original production and restored for the film and subsequent revivals, tries to acknowledge some of the more complex struggles of serving men, but ultimately this too also still falls short. Cable sings about his girl back home and his family's plans for him and his future, and how they do not understand what

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<sup>45</sup> Hammerstein and Logan, "South Pacific," 21.

<sup>46</sup> Hammerstein and Logan, "South Pacific," 66.

<sup>47</sup> In the 2008 revival of *South Pacific* at Lincoln Center, Lieutenant's Cable's acting for a majority of the second act is informed by the malaria he has contracted, and acts physically unwell and dazed, which gives more gravity to the disease's reality. There is so stage directions in the libretto directing this, largely implying it is a choice potential choice that some actors or directors interpret for their productions but brings *South Pacific* more accuracy in small ways than the original production presented.

he is experiencing as they are so far away back in the States. However, when discussing some of what he has experienced as a USMC Lieutenant, it all comes back to “coconut palms and banyan trees and coral sands.”<sup>48</sup> As opposed to expressing nostalgia for home or detailing his combat service, the song instead romanticizes Cable’s experiences in the South Pacific, where he ultimately wants to stay after the war to escape the racism and pressure his family in Philadelphia places on him. Akin to other songs in the musical like “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught,” “My Girl Back Home” provides strong commentary on America’s deep-seated racial views and serves the show’s message about racial tolerance. However, in doing so it romanticizes the setting of the Pacific Theatre, helping further dissociate it from the grim realities of the war experience.

While efforts have been made in subsequent revivals, such as Bartlett Sher’s 2008 Broadway revival, to try and instill a more serious and harrowing view of the war to *South Pacific*, the show is ultimately still an unwaveringly ticker-tape parade on a Broadway stage for American militarism and ‘Good War’ sentiment.<sup>49</sup> No matter what the context, be it drama or comedy, at points where the *South Pacific* could have nuanced discussions about the Second World War, it all comes back to the same notions of island escapism presented by the play. *South Pacific*, while an important piece of war memory that came in within five years post-war, heavily mythologizes the historical events upon which it is based.

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<sup>48</sup> [“My Girl Back Home,” Sheet Music and Lyrics, Box 16, Folder 9], Richard Rodgers Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

<sup>49</sup> Discussion of the changes made in Sher’s 2008 revival can be found in the chapter: Conclusion: Culture Changes the Musical, *The Musical Changes Culture*.



### ***Orientalism at Work: South Pacific's Asian and Pacific Islanders***

A major significance of *South Pacific* was how it highlighted the fact that Americans fought a war against enemies they perceived as racist when “their own racism remain[ed] unresolved” and continued even past the war’s conclusion.<sup>50</sup> The show’s progressive creative team mainly achieved this through the show’s most controversial number of “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught,” which highlights the ugly side of American racism. The song presents the question of racism as a nature versus nurture issue, which is, in Rodgers and Hammerstein’s opinion, a nurture problem. It accomplishes this by highlighting how people are conditioned to have racist beliefs by their families and surroundings when they are children and will proceed to carry this sentiment through the rest of their lives. The song itself provoked a fierce response on both sides, as conservative legislators in Georgia wanted to ban the show as leftist propaganda and teachers wanted to use the song in classrooms to promote racial tolerance.<sup>51</sup> The show’s progressive take on race was applauded, but it had one major issue: its depiction of Asian peoples.

Although the show pushed boundaries by critiquing the American record on civil rights and advocating racial tolerance in general, it also reinforced and perpetuated racist caricatures and stereotypes of Asian and Pacific Islanders.<sup>52</sup> In *South Pacific*, the islanders are backgrounded in the narrative and are largely props to illustrate the show’s tropical island mystique setting.

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<sup>50</sup> Jim Lovensheimer, *South Pacific: Paradise Rewritten* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>51</sup> “Georgia Legislators Score ‘South Pacific’; See Red Philosophy in Song Against Bias” *New York Times*, March 1, 1953, pg. 79.; [Letter to Oscar Hammerstein II from Miss Helen I. Davis, February 10, 1950, Box 50-52], Oscar Hammerstein II Collection, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

<sup>52</sup> In the *South Pacific* libretto, the people of color characters are referred to as either native, who are presumably Pacific Islanders, and others who are referred to as Tonkinese, who are presumably from the Tonkin region of Vietnam in Southeast Asia. For purposes of this paper, these are the two Western-imposed classifications that will be used. From the libretto, it is unclear if Rodgers, Hammerstein, and Logan were aware of or understood the nationalities or ethnicities of the people they were representing or the associated historical anthropology.

Outside of the American ‘model minority’ stereotype, one of the main stereotypes commonly attributed to Asian peoples is exoticism. Colonial legacies in the Asia-Pacific region have painted the orientalist picture of the region as a sensual, mysterious, and foreign untamed place for Westerners to both exploit and come to understand. *South Pacific* is no different, as the island of Bali’Hai and its people are meant to be full of wonder and completely untouched from the world at war surrounding them. With little to no agency, the Asian and Pacific Islander people are there to enchant, entice, and in some cases manipulate American servicemen away from the monotonous war effort and towards both recreation and sexual adventurism.

This highly racialized climate presents a dim representation of local non-European peoples. While the *South Pacific*’s songs and libretto may preach racial tolerance, several moments are retrospectively racist. The most significant victims of racist caricatures and stereotypes are the show’s Southeast Asian characters, Liat and Bloody Mary, who are poorly treated by the libretto. Whereas in critical reviews, the Asian characters like Bloody Mary are celebrated for providing comedic relief, their heritage and culture become the show’s punch line and serve as dangerous caricatures for people of color.

Bloody Mary is a Tonkinese woman, solely out to make money and sell off her daughter, Liat, to any American buyer. She speaks in incredibly broken English, such as “Hallo, G.I. ...Grass skirt? Very sexy! Fo’ dollar? ... Sexy ... You buy? Where you go?”<sup>53</sup> Additionally, Bloody Mary’s character is described in the libretto as follows: “She is small, yellow with oriental eyes. Her teeth are stained with betel juice.”<sup>54</sup> Bloody Mary serves as a degrading picture of the non-whites encountered during the war, who will go as far as to threaten to marry

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<sup>53</sup> Hammerstein and Logan, “South Pacific,” 12.

<sup>54</sup> Hammerstein and Logan, “South Pacific,” 12.

Liat off to a rich drunkard plantation owner to guilt Lieutenant Cable into marrying her daughter.<sup>55</sup> Throughout the play, Bloody Mary is representative of the stereotype towards Southeast Asian women being ‘Dragon Ladies’ or being strong, domineering, manipulative, and deceitful women.

The character Liat, as well as the islanders of Bali’hai, do not fare any better as Asian representations in theatre. Their portrayals highlight tone-deaf racist caricatures and language that was meant to be comedic and acceptable at the time the show premiered. When Luther Billis describes Bali’Hai, he discusses the cultural ceremony of the boar occurring on the nearby island as “tribal, ceremonial, primitive, but astonishing,” with a specific focus on the “coconut liquor and women danc[ing] around with just skirts on.”<sup>56</sup> These lines exhibit the ignorance and racism sailors held toward the local population by seeing them as ‘primitive’ peoples, which mirrors the greater feeling and gravity of racist propaganda during the Pacific War. Where locals are not depicted as backward, they are presented like Henry or Emile’s mixed-race children, who are civilized, French-speaking people that fit neatly into the island’s framework of French colonialism.

While the islanders are not as dehumanized as discussions of the Japanese in the show (see below), they are objectified and exoticized, which not only contributes to the media fetishizing and exoticizing Asian peoples but also complements the show’s overall ‘exotic’ setting. The best example of this is Liat’s character, who does not speak throughout the play and, more than anything, is a one-dimensional object for Lieutenant Cable to discover his own internalized racism, as opposed to a dynamic, multi-faceted character. Whereas her mother

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<sup>55</sup> Hammerstein and Logan, “South Pacific,” 67.

<sup>56</sup> Hammerstein and Logan, “South Pacific,” 24.

represents one-half of the traditional Asian female archetypes in media, her daughter fulfills the other half, as a submissive prop and plot point. Additionally, Joe and Liat's relationship "seems only sexual," which only further feeds into stereotypes that fetishize and exoticize people of Asian descent, especially when placed alongside the "distinctly non-sexual" relationship between two Caucasian people, Emile, and Nellie.<sup>57</sup>

Some racist elements towards Asian peoples, in general, reflect the era, such as the libretto's utilization of the racial slur 'Jap' eleven times throughout the course of the play by American military-aligned characters.<sup>58</sup> This slur was commonplace in wartime propaganda because "monosyllabic enemies are easier to despise than others" and could be used in catchy slogans like "Rap the Jap" or for quick reference.<sup>59</sup> The usage of the term, while offensive, is period accurate to the widespread wartime anti-Japanese sentiment, especially in the Pacific Theatre, which was more racially charged than in the European Theater. During the war, both in military lingo and propaganda the Japanese enemy was also dehumanized into "dwarfish but vicious species" of sup-human but powerful animals that made "desirable trophies" when tortured and killed.<sup>60</sup> This anti-Japanese sentiment became subdued after the war and during the American occupation of Japan, where people realized the "subtle... and delica[te]" nature of Japanese people who were now democratized and committed to peace.<sup>61</sup> However, the fact that Americans rediscovered the humanity that they lost sight of during the war does not undo the xenophobic damage of wartime propaganda. As to the usage of the 'Jap' slur in *South Pacific*, it is likely that this normalized slur would not have been seen as a problem, especially because the

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<sup>57</sup> Andrea Most, "You've Got to be Carefully Taught," in *Making Americans: Jews and the Broadway Musical* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 155.

<sup>58</sup> Hammerstein and Logan, "South Pacific."

<sup>59</sup> Fussell, *Wartime*, 117.

<sup>60</sup> Fussell, *Wartime*, 120.

<sup>61</sup> Fussell, *Wartime*, 120.

fact that the Japanese were America's enemies during the war was uncontroversial across all political leanings. From a political standpoint, it is also arguable that if Rodgers and Hammerstein did not employ this hatred for the wartime Japanese in this musical, they might have been accused even more for pushing the limits of tolerance as extreme leftists. The dehumanization of the Japanese people was already embedded into the war experience, so this language locates the musical temporally and reflects American attitudes toward their former wartime enemy.

*South Pacific* is a racially charged play that aims to grapple with the tolerance of other races which is overshadowed by the brutality and dehumanization of the war and the American postwar climate.<sup>62</sup> For some, *South Pacific* was a beacon of light and used as a call to action to build a more tolerant society, while for others it was a threatening piece of propaganda from a leftist and potentially communist artistic team that was only stirring up trouble. It conversely reflects the racially charged and 'East versus West' nature of the Pacific region and reaffirms notions of Western superiority and civility and corresponding notions of Eastern inferiority and barbarity. While the show should be acknowledged for its progressive nature at the time of its creation, it is also important to retrospectively reflect on some of its elements that contradict the very theme the show upholds and proves that it is not, and was never, a piece of perfect media presenting racial tolerance.

### ***The Good War's Golden Age***

Overall, musical theatre of the 1940s and 1950s celebrated America's moral high ground, victory, and militaristic pride in light of the Second World War's conclusion. Absent of any

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<sup>62</sup> Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 6.

trauma undergone on the front lines and rear areas, musical theatre sanitized depictions of the war, like the rest of society, put on rose-colored glasses when remembering the conflict. By emphasizing the rest, recreation, and adventure of military service, *South Pacific* is a piece to commemorate the Greatest Generation's valor and can-do attitude and leaves no space for processing the trauma that forged its veterans. Through othering Asian characters, the musical justifies the dehumanization of the Japanese and rationalizes postwar American military presence in these regions. The Pacific War and the media surrounding it were seen as a testament that Asia needed to be guided by the hand of the international system's resident superpower. Musical theatre of this period generated a legacy that would not be contested until the United States was hit by a crisis of confidence that reshaped how the nation viewed itself: Vietnam.

### **Chapter III – *Miss Saigon*: Grappling with Wartime Gravity (1960s-1990s)**

For the latter half of the twentieth century the US, as the self-proclaimed international harbinger of democracy, was defined largely by Cold War politics and associated conflicts to contain communism. Similarly, these decades were tumultuous politically in the wake of the civil rights movement, anti-war activism against American action in Vietnam, and government corruption scandals like Watergate. The Vietnam War, which lasted over two decades, was heavily contested domestically as sectors of the American populace debated the nation's overseas commitment in the wake of mounting death tolls and government misdirection as revealed by the Pentagon Papers. American barbarism such as the Mỹ Lai massacre and the deployment of techniques such as carpet bombing and Agent Orange heightened tensions on the home front.<sup>1</sup> After the nation's long-term commitment, the war still ended in a North Vietnamese and Viet Cong/PRG victory, leading to an American crisis of military confidence that would not be alleviated until the (First) Persian Gulf War of 1990–91.<sup>2</sup>

When representing war, American musical theatre from the 1960s to the 1990s provided a backlash to the 'Good War' of World War II and in response to the Vietnam War. While still romanticized in some regards, several musicals actively tried to grapple with the horrors of war, conscription, totalitarianism, and other anxieties of the period. The three major musicals from this period that perform this function are *Cabaret* (John Kander, Fred Ebb, 1966), *Hair: The*

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<sup>1</sup> The Mỹ Lai massacre was a mass murder that occurred on March 16, 1968, when US troops killed a several hundred unarmed South Vietnamese civilians.

<sup>2</sup> George C. Herring "Reflecting the Last War: The Persian Gulf and The 'Vietnam Syndrome'," *Journal of Third World Studies* 10, no. 1 (1993): 44. accessed June 1, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45197324>.

*American Tribal Love-Rock Musical* (Galt MacDermot, Gerome Ragni, James Rado, 1967), and *Miss Saigon* (Claude-Michel Schönberg, Alain Boublil, Richard Maltby Jr., 1991).

Unlike the ‘Good War’ of the 1940s, Vietnam has a much more complicated legacy in popular American memory and history. In his book *America’s Longest War*, historian George C. Herring argues that, unlike previous wars, Vietnam “occurred in a time of social upheaval” where generational and class strife, as well as Cold War tensions, ran high and completely divided the American populace.<sup>3</sup> On the home front, one side saw the Vietnam War as a noble cause to help contain communism, while the other side either questioned the domino theory, which held that communism in one nation would quickly spread to neighboring countries, or saw the war as an immoral crusade where the “American ruling class exploited helpless people to sustain a decadent capitalist system.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, as the war dragged on from the Johnson to the Nixon administration, other political scandals like Watergate emerged that made many Americans further disillusioned with a government they were already skeptical of for pouring tons of money, resources, and American lives into Southeast Asia. Instead of a triumphant victory like that of the First or Second World War where the United States emerged as a dominant foreign power, the nation’s unassailability came into question as the United States withdrew from the war, the resulting peace perceived as an American defeat due to the subsequent establishment of communism in a reunified Vietnam.

Herring claims that “Vietnam’s greatest impact was in the realm of the spirit” as the war’s end only brought a “deep residue of frustration, anger, and disillusionment.”<sup>5</sup> This crisis of

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<sup>3</sup> George C. Herring, *America’s Longest War: The United States and Vietnam 1950-1975*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1996), 186.

<sup>4</sup> Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 186–8.

<sup>5</sup> Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 304–5.



American confidence is often referred to as ‘Vietnam Syndrome.’ Postwar, both individuals and the American collective were forced to reflect on Vietnam’s legacy relating to American losses, the nation’s self-image, and attitude towards future war-making. The defeat in Vietnam, despite American superiority of wealth and military might, caused both psychological and collective societal trauma that was exacerbated through high casualty rates, images of combat on the evening newscasts, guilt about the treatment of veterans and South Vietnamese civilians, corruption in defense department contracts, and the belief that intervention in Vietnam was morally unjustifiable. Due to the phantom of Vietnam, policymakers wanted to ensure that the United States would never “gradually tiptoe into questionable wars without a clear-cut objective, overwhelming military force, an endgame strategy, and, most importantly, the support of Congress and the American people.”<sup>6</sup> The aversion to militarism and war that permeated post-Vietnam American society became modeled in some forms of the arts and media, contrasting heavily with the morally justified and unapologetically militarism of the post-World War II years. The impact of the Vietnam War would bring a more nuanced version of war to the stage as Americans approached military commitments abroad with more scrutiny.

The first musical reflecting these trends was *Cabaret* (1966), which came out during the Vietnam War and is unique in that it is a tale of three wars that combines the contemporary context with a story centered around both post-World War I reflection and the approach of World War II. Set in the early 1930s, *Cabaret* follows the experience of an American’s romance with a performer from the Kit Kat Klub in Berlin during the decline of the Weimar Republic and the rise of the Third Reich in interwar Germany. During *Cabaret*, the Second World War looms

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<sup>6</sup> Marvin Kalb, “It’s Called the Vietnam Syndrome, and It’s Back,” *Brookings*, January 22, 2013, accessed March 28, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2013/01/22/its-called-the-vietnam-syndrome-and-its-back/>.

in the future, while the aftereffects of the First World War hover over the dying democracy of Weimar Germany. Yet it is one of the earliest World War II-adjacent musicals that does not try to reinforce the myth of the ‘Good War.’ This being said, *Cabaret* cannot be separated from the sociopolitical climate of the 1960s and 1970s that created the context for the musical and subsequent film.<sup>7</sup> These influences include but are not limited to American political violence, the Vietnam War, and the global Cold War. Both the stage version and film adaptation “[suggest] a critique of the complacency both of the German population during the Nazi period and the American public in the Vietnam Era.”<sup>8</sup> It has been argued that Bob Fosse’s film version of *Cabaret* (1972) is much more deeply connected with the Vietnam Era than the original stage musical. This is because the musical initially came out prior to the war’s deadliest year, 1968. In 1972, Fosse’s work is informed much more by the tragedy of the later war years in Vietnam and the increasingly widespread distrust and disillusionment with both the government and the nation at large.<sup>9</sup> At the time knowledge of atrocities like the Mỹ Lai massacre was public, the Watergate scandal was ongoing, and the government was seen as highly corrupt and sometimes referred to as ‘fascist,’ none of which was seen in 1966 when the show premiered.<sup>10</sup> While *Cabaret* is about Weimar, its themes of complacency, disillusionment, corruption, also rang true for the Vietnam Era American populace at the time. This also marks *Cabaret* as a show that contests the celebration of war and militarism of the previous decades’ musicals.

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<sup>7</sup> Raymond Knapp, "Dealing with the Second World War," in *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 240, accessed June 22, 2020, doi:10.2307/j.ctv39x6z2.14.

<sup>8</sup> Terri J. Gordon, "Film in the Second Degree: 'Cabaret' and the Dark Side of Laughter," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 152, no. 4 (2008): 449, accessed March 4, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40541603>.

<sup>9</sup> Randy Clark, "Bending the Genre: The Stage and Screen Versions of Cabaret," *Literature/Film Quarterly* 19 (1): 58.

<sup>10</sup> Clark, "Bending the Genre," 58.

In regard to World War II, *Cabaret* deliberately engages with antisemitism and alludes to the subsequent oppression and annihilation of Jewish peoples under the Third Reich in ways that *The Sound of Music* did not dare to. While the original production has several politically overt numbers that tackle antisemitism directly, including “If You Could See Her” in the stage and film versions and the characters of Fraulein Schneider and Herr Schultz on stage and Natalia and Fritz on screen. Efforts have also been made in more recent productions to reinforce the ties to the Holocaust and by association the human costs of war and genocide.<sup>11</sup> In the 1993 production at London’s Donmar Warehouse and the subsequent 1998 and 2014 revivals based on the 1993 production, the show’s ending was restaged as the cabaret “metamorph[izes] into a death camp” as the emcee removes “his coat to reveal striped prison clothes with a yellow star and a pink triangle, Nazi labels for Jew and homosexual.”<sup>12</sup> While in the original production audiences with historical knowledge could fill in the gap as to what would befall the musical’s Jewish and homosexual characters, the staging introduced by director Sam Mendes leaves nothing to the imagination and drives home the tragedies that occurred under the Third Reich. These recent iterations of *Cabaret* have forced audiences to grapple with Second World War’s greater impacts and its blunt, overtly political stance affirms that a musical should not function as a celebration of past wars but instead should serve as a cautionary tale for the future.

As opposed to providing a cautionary Vietnam War tale by reflecting on the past legacies of Weimar, *Hair* explored and confronted the war in Vietnam as it was still going on. Based on

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<sup>11</sup> In the number “If You Could See Her,” the Emcee of the Kit Kat Klub laments to the audience about how society frowns upon his relationship with a female gorilla and does not understand their relationship. In the final lyric, the Emcee sings that “if you could see her thru my eyes, she wouldn’t look Jewish at all,” highlighting how the gorilla served as a stand-in for a Jewish woman and directly addressing the rising antisemitism of the Weimar period and subsequent Third Reich.

<sup>12</sup> James Leve and Geoffrey Block, “The Divinely Decadent Lives of Cabaret,” in *Kander and Ebb* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 72–73, accessed June 22, 2020, [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vm595.7](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5vm595.7).

the late 1960s sexual revolution and hippie counterculture movement, *Hair* follows a “tribe” of New York City bohemians. While the show focuses on the experience of hippies, *Hair*’s “major bolstering prop [is] always offstage—the Vietnam War” and the associated emotions with the war drive both the onstage plot and the audience’s connection to the show itself.<sup>13</sup> The show’s most notable arc of the plot surrounds the character Claude who is torn about resisting conscription through burning his draft card to ensure he, as a pacifist, does not compromise his morals. Claude eventually gets drafted and must leave the “tribe,” only to die in Vietnam and have his corpse lain out onstage before curtain call. The show also voices the counterculture generation’s scathing observations through the tribe’s dialogue, such as, “The draft is white people sending black people to make war on yellow people to defend the land they stole from the red people.”<sup>14</sup> By juxtaposing the warmongering conservative older generation with a pacifist, free-loving, progressive one, *Hair* highlights the divisive nature of American society during the Vietnam War while also underscoring the human cost of the war. While both *Hair* and *Cabaret* engage with societal tolls of war and its horrors tangentially, two decades later Alain Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg would take audiences directly to the Fall of Saigon itself and its aftermath in their blockbuster hit *Miss Saigon*, a musical that would highlight how traumatic war was for veterans and civilian populations and begs the question of when wars ever truly end.

### ***Case Study: Boublil and Schönberg’s Miss Saigon (1991)***

*Miss Saigon* is a Broadway musical that premiered at the Broadway Theatre on April 11, 1991, after its London West End run from September 1989 to October 1990 at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. The Claude-Michel Schönberg, Alain Boublil, and Richard Maltby Jr. megamusical

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<sup>13</sup> T.E. Kalen, “Defoliated,” *Time*, October 17, 1977, in *New York Theatre Critics’ Reviews*, eds. Joan Marlow and Betty Blake, vol. 38, Critics’ Theatre Reviews, 1977, 185.

<sup>14</sup> Gerome Ragni and James Rado, “Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical” (New York: Pocket Books, 1966), 31.

would run ten years on Broadway until January 28, 2001, after 4,092 performances.<sup>15</sup> It has received numerous awards and nominations and has since been revived both on the West End and on Broadway and has seen several American, British, and international touring productions. While a box office success, the show has also been the subject of multiple controversies surrounding questions of casting, yellowface, Orientalist stereotypes, and misogyny, making it a socio-politically contentious musical to this day.<sup>16</sup>

According to composer and co-librettist Claude-Michel Schönberg, “*Miss Saigon* is not a history of the Vietnam War. It’s a story of two people lost in the middle of the war,” which is reflected in the show’s plot and context.<sup>17</sup> The show itself was inspired by two things: a news photograph and the Giacomo Puccini opera *Madama Butterfly* (1904). The news photo was taken in 1975 at the Tan Son Nhut Airport, a Republic of Vietnam Air Force facility near Saigon, and features a Vietnamese woman parting with her child so she could live in America with her GI father. Boublil and Schönberg believed the featured woman making the ultimate sacrifice for her child paralleled that of Cio-Cio-san, the Japanese wife to a US Naval Officer, in *Madama*

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<sup>15</sup> The megamusical is a large-scale musical, comparable to a blockbuster movie, that are produced for commercial profit known for their melodramatic plots, universal themes, large budgets, and focus on the visual spectacle. Other notable examples include Boublil and Schönberg’s *Les Misérables* (1985) and Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *Cats* (1981) and *Phantom of the Opera* (1986). “Miss Saigon,” *Playbill*, New York City, New York, accessed May 31, 2021, <https://www.playbill.com/production/miss-saigon-broadway-theatre-vault-0000012256>.

<sup>16</sup> The casting scandal of 1990 included casting a white actor, Jonathan Pryce, to play the Engineer, a half-French and half-Vietnamese character who is the byproduct of colonization. While Pryce played the Engineer on the West End and utilized yellowface, it became a scandal when the musical was set to transfer to the United States. The discussion was contentious front-page news as advocates for both sides fought over the decision, but in the end, Pryce would still be cast. The controversy surrounding Orientalist tropes and misogyny will be discussed therein this chapter. Michael Paulson, “The Battle of ‘Miss Saigon’: Yellowface, Art and Opportunity,” *The New York Times* (New York, NY), March 17, 2017, accessed May 31, 2021 <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/17/theater/the-battle-of-miss-saigon-yellowface-art-and-opportunity.html#:~:text=When%20%22Miss%20Saigon%22%20first%20looked,one%20of%20the%20show's%20stars.>

<sup>17</sup> Claude-Michel Schönberg, quoted in Margaret Vermette, *The Musical World of Boublil and Schönberg: The Creators of Les Misérables, Miss Saigon, Martin Guerre, and the Pirate Queen* (New York: Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2006), 36.

*Butterfly* who commits suicide so her child can live with his father and new American wife.<sup>18</sup>

Based on these influences, Boublil and Schönberg created *Miss Saigon*: A Vietnam War-era retelling of *Madama Butterfly*.

*Miss Saigon* follows the romance between an American Marine named Chris and a South Vietnamese bargirl named Kim who fall in love in the final few days before the Fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. While at this point in the war American forces withdrew from combat operations, some service members remained to advise the South Vietnamese and evacuate remaining American and allied citizens, South Vietnamese officials, and eligible refugees from the country. One of these service members is Chris, who voluntarily reenlists and works with the American embassy as a driver in Saigon where he meets Kim at the Dreamland nightclub.<sup>19</sup> The couple marries and conceives a child but when the Americans evacuated from Saigon, Kim is unable to join Chris on the last helicopter out of the city. Three years later, Chris marries an American woman named Ellen and is coping with his PTSD, while Kim is still living in Saigon with their child, Tam. When Kim's former betrothed, a Vietnamese Commissar named Thuy, tries to force Kim to marry him and kill Tam, Kim shoots Thuy. Kim and her former pimp, the Engineer, escape with Tam to Bangkok where they live and work as refugees, hoping to make it to America on account of Tam's American parentage. When an organization that attempts to reunite *bụi đời*, or the children left behind during the war to a Vietnamese mother and a US military father, one of Chris's friends learns Kim and her child are still alive and endeavors to

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<sup>18</sup> Claude-Michel Schönberg, quoted in Vermette, *The Musical World of Boublil and Schönberg*, 36.

<sup>19</sup> While the musical never explicitly mentions when Chris rejoins the service, but it can be assumed his recent tour of duty began in late winter or spring of '74 as most enlisted or draftees Marines served 13-month tours and it's implied Chris' tour will be over soon in April of 1975 even if the war hadn't ended.

reconnect the two families.<sup>20</sup> Once Kim realizes Chris and Ellen will not take them back to America, Kim commits suicide so that they must take Tam with them.<sup>21</sup>

In the context of war-focused musical theatre, *Miss Saigon* not only departs from earlier musicals but also perpetuates several older tropes. While *Miss Saigon* isn't an unapologetically flag-waving and pro-military spectacle like the musicals of the 1940s and 1950s, it is still a piece of "gripping entertainment [from] the old school (specifically, the Rogers and Hammerstein East-meets-West school of *South Pacific* and *The King and I*)."<sup>22</sup> *Miss Saigon* actively contends onstage with the legacy of American guilt surrounding the Vietnam War and highlights the costs and consequences of war, such as civilian impact, in ways earlier musicals dared not touch. However, *Miss Saigon* still pats America on the back for its efforts in Vietnam and is a vehicle for processing the nation's trauma through exploiting the Vietnamese people. *Miss Saigon* is also a musical deeply rooted in Orientalist thinking in which every Vietnamese character is presented as a prostitute, derelict, Communist, or capitalist sleazeball. Just like her Golden Age forebears, the musical privileges grotesque sexualization, romanticization, and exoticization to history and authenticity. While *Miss Saigon* makes strides in grappling with key war and societal questions such as 'If and when do wars really end?' it does so in a way that is detrimental to the

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<sup>20</sup> *Bụi đời* became a popular term to refer to these Amerasian children of war after the premiere of *Miss Saigon* due to the song "Bụi-Đời" about this group, which is a testament to *Miss Saigon*'s cultural relevance and impact.

<sup>21</sup> It is important to note that in the inspiration piece, *Madama Butterfly*, Cio-Cio-san's suicide is an act of grief, and arguably agency. After her child is taken from her and Cio-Cio-san chooses to die honorably instead of living with shame. Conversely, Kim's suicide is used to force Chris to take the child back to America because Kim and Ellen will be unable to coexist, as they both love Chris. Kim kills herself out of desperation to at least save her son because she cannot be, which is portrayed as more manipulative than it is honorable. While both pieces exploit Asian suffering and have major issues, the choice of chronology in *Miss Saigon* can feel comparatively insidious.

<sup>22</sup> Frank Rich, "'Miss Saigon Arrives, from the Old School: 'Miss Saigon' Arrives, from the Old School a British Production is made Leaner. Review/Theater," *New York Times* (1923-Current File), April 12, 1991, <https://login.libproxy.chapman.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.libproxy.chapman.edu/historical-newspapers/miss-saigon-arrives-old-school/docview/108828530/se-2?accountid=10051>.

Vietnamese by backgrounding them in their own nation's history and forcibly 'Othering' them through its East-versus-West context.

### ***Staging War Guilt and Vietnam as an American Tragedy***

When audiences are first introduced to the American GIs at Dreamland, a nightclub and brothel in Saigon, they see disillusioned soldiers throwing what the GIs fondly call, "a good-bye party in hell" as they "forget about the threat [and] forget the Viet Cong" and indulge in carnal pleasures.<sup>23</sup> *Miss Saigon* takes these soldiers through the final days before Saigon's fall and their experiences three years postwar as they come to grips with the American experience in Vietnam. While the show centers around Vietnamese characters, they are effectively backgrounded in the narrative and serve as props through which war trauma is processed on stage. Written by two white Frenchmen with the help of an American co-lyricist, *Miss Saigon* is *not* written for Vietnamese and Asian audiences, which is an issue that members of the Asian American community have attested to.<sup>24</sup> It is instead written by Westerners from imperialist and former imperialist nations for Westerners from imperialist and former imperialist nations. Through its framing of the narrative, *Miss Saigon* reinforces the popular notion in American commemoration and memory that the Vietnam War "was primarily an American tragedy ... [that] weakened an American sense of pride and patriotism" and tends to forget the legacy of American destruction in Vietnam.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Claude-Michel Schönberg, *Miss Saigon*, (London: Cameron Makintosh (Overseas) Ltd., 1989, 20–3.

<sup>24</sup> Deip Tran, "I Am Miss Saigon, and I Hate It," *American Theatre*, April 13, 2017, accessed June 2, 2021, <https://www.americantheatre.org/2017/04/13/i-am-miss-saigon-and-i-hate-it/>; Jonathan Castanien, "Stories for Us," *Mixed Up Thoughts*, April 7, 2017, accessed June 2, 2021, <https://mixedupthoughtsblog.wordpress.com/2017/04/07/stories-for-us/>.

<sup>25</sup> Christian Appy, "The Real Tragedy of the Vietnam War," *Salon*, February 15, 2015, accessed June 4, 2021, [https://www.salon.com/2015/02/13/the\\_real\\_tragedy\\_of\\_the\\_vietnam\\_war\\_partner/](https://www.salon.com/2015/02/13/the_real_tragedy_of_the_vietnam_war_partner/).



Several characters in *Miss Saigon* feel more like symbols than actual characters. For example, Thuy is representative of the power and terror associated with communism whereas Kim and her child Tam are representative of defenseless South Vietnamese civilians who fell victim to the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) and the Viet Cong and were failed by America. Thus, the heavy hand of American idealism and subsequent disillusionment and guilt comes through the struggles of Chris, a United States Marine Sergeant working in the rear at the American Embassy in Saigon. In an interview for the book *The Musical World of Boublil and Schönberg*, co-librettist Richard Maltby Jr. spoke about Chris's character vis-à-vis the rest of the show:

Chris is ... truly an American. He's not smart, he's not political, but he's good hearted and wants to do the right thing. In that sense he can be seen as a metaphor for America. His story becomes something much bigger, because on a human level his attempt to come in and save the girl leads to tragedy, and it's exactly the same story as America's involvement in Vietnam.<sup>26</sup>

Because Chris is an everyman who Western audiences are meant to identify with, it is fitting that several of his songs contend with the Vietnam War experience and subsequent guilt from its legacy. The first number to do so is "Why God, Why?" where Chris struggles with the fact he was ready to leave Vietnam for good but has incomprehensibly fallen in love with a young South Vietnamese bargirl, Kim. Musically, the song contrasts Chris's explosive anger surrounding the war itself with his romanticization of Kim by associating quick, booming, and explosive melodies with the former, contrasted by romantic, soft, swelling melodies with the latter.

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<sup>26</sup> Richard Maltby Jr., quoted in Vermette, *The Musical World of Boublil and Schönberg*, 81.

Lyrically, the song highlights the dilemmas Chris faces as a US Marine and his emotions that would characterize elements of Vietnam. Audiences are meant to empathize with Chris's struggle and confusion about finding something good in a tragic war that is filled with negative connotations as it occurred and in popular memory. For example, Chris begs God to explain why he has fallen for Kim and sings that "I can't help her, no one can," which serves to heighten the drama and tragedy of it all and is yet another example of the musical's larger trend to rob the Vietnamese people of their agency. Additionally, as the musical is set in 1975 in the immediate aftermath of Watergate, Chris's disillusionment is meant to parallel the rest of the American populace. Chris, like the nation, has been inundated with ideas that the war is being run from Washington DC have been perpetuated and has witnessed the war's deadliest years such as 1968. Because Chris is the entry point for Americans, when he sings about how "as long as you don't believe anything" and know how to manipulate people "a guy like [him] can live like a king" in Saigon" audiences are supposed to understand where he is coming from here when considering the war's legacy in modern memory.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout, Chris is dismissive and harsh towards civilians, seemingly bereft of any of American idealism and spirit, until he finds Kim who reignites that spark for him. When she tells him about "how [her] village was burned, ... how [her] family was blasted away, how [she] ran from the rice field and saw them in flames, [and] how [her] parents were bodies whose faces were gone," only then does Chris realize who and what he and his nation are truly fighting to save.<sup>28</sup> From this moment on, Chris self-assuredly reinforces the notion that American forces were the only ones who could protect the South Vietnamese people from the ravages of North

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<sup>27</sup> Schönberg, *Miss Saigon*, 55.

<sup>28</sup> Schönberg, *Miss Saigon*, 60–1.

Vietnamese communism. Instead of critically examining how American wartime barbarism was also hurting the South Vietnamese population, the Westerner Chris sees himself as the salvation for the Easterner Kim, which feeds the musical's white savior narrative.<sup>29</sup> By putting a face and a personal stake to the Vietnam conflict, Chris is reinvigorated with a determination to help Kim out of her destitution in Saigon setting the course for what will become the ultimate tragedy of *Miss Saigon*: Kim's suicide.

The other source of tragedy in *Miss Saigon* is what the war experience did to Chris by reminding audiences of the war's impact on American veterans. Vietnam expert and historian Christian Appy argues that to sanitize the memory of Vietnam and work towards national 'healing,' Vietnam's narrative foregrounded a belief that "veterans [were] the greatest victims of the war" due to their postwar treatment, most notably by antiwar activists.<sup>30</sup> This helped to disguise the abuses of the American government, which sent swaths of soldiers to Vietnam only to fail in supporting them upon their return. Chris's character reinforces this notion. After all, he attributes rejoining the service in the war's final years because he struggled to reintegrate back within an American society that had formulated its own opinions on the war and his experience. For example, in "Why God, Why?" Chris sings how "when [he] went home before no one talked of the war [and] What they knew from TV didn't have a thing to do with [him]" as a Marine serving in the rear areas in the war's later years.<sup>31</sup> As civilians on the home front didn't understand his experience and seemed ignorant of the conflict, especially as America withdrew

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<sup>29</sup> The white savior is a common trope in entertainment where a Messiah-like white character rescues non-white characters and the white character's grow as a result of the experience. It privileges the experiences of the non-marginalized people over marginalized ones and often treats marginalized peoples as victims who lack agency and could not overcome their plight without the help of the white actor. These characters effectively undertake modern versions of Rudyard's Kipling "White Man's Burden" and are often tinged with colonialist and Orientalist notions.

<sup>30</sup> Appy, "The Real Tragedy of the Vietnam War."

<sup>31</sup> Schönberg, *Miss Saigon*, 53–4.

and pursued Vietnamization policy, Chris felt more comfortable in Vietnam than back home, attesting to the failure of America to care for its returning soldiers.<sup>32</sup>

Chris's postwar struggle with war guilt and post-traumatic stress disorder also reinforces *Miss Saigon*'s narrative of Vietnam as primarily an American tragedy, especially for the veterans who fought in the war. Around two-thirds of *Miss Saigon* takes place in 1978, three years after the Fall of Saigon when the characters are grappling with the war's aftermath. While Kim, the Engineer, and Tam have become refugees, escaping from Vietnam via boat as part of the larger Indochina refugee crisis, Chris has remarried but is still troubled by memories of the war. While he does not discuss this with his wife until he is forced to, Chris is shown to have violent nightmares associated with leaving Kim behind in Saigon. These frustrations and fears manifest completely in the song "Confrontation" where Chris gives his wife an honest account of his wartime experiences:

<i>Let me tell you the way it was</i>	<i>And through her eyes I suffered, too</i>
<i>Back when I was a different man</i>	<i>In spite of all the things that were</i>
<i>Back when I didn't have a clue who I am</i>	<i>I started to believe in her</i>
<i>The feelings locked behind a dam</i>	
<i>That kept me there in Vietnam</i>	<i>So I wanted to save her, protect her</i>
	<i>Christ, I'm American?</i>
<i>There in the shambles of a war</i>	<i>How could I fail to do good</i>
<i>I found what I was looking for</i>	<i>All I made was a mess just like everyone else</i>
<i>Saigon was crazed, but she was real</i>	<i>In a place full of mystery</i>
<i>And for one moment I could feel</i>	<i>That I never once understood</i> <sup>33</sup>

It is also important to note that the revivals of *Miss Saigon* include an additional lyric "They drafted me and shipped me out to wind up in a senseless fight" before "In the

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<sup>32</sup> Vietnamization was one of Nixon's strategies to end American involvement in Vietnam by reducing American US combat troops and training and deploying the Republic of Vietnam's military forces, especially in combat roles, in the later years of the war. It was ultimately unsuccessful as the PAVN and Viet Cong would eventually take Saigon in 1975 and reunify the country under communist rule. Schönberg, *Miss Saigon*, 54.

<sup>33</sup> Schönberg, *Miss Saigon*, 329–32.

shambles...” which further reinforces the show’s veteran-as-victim narrative.<sup>34</sup> While there is truth to this narrative and Chris’s representation of these experiences historically, it still has been used to reinforce the idea of Vietnam as an American tragedy. Thus, “Confrontation” is fittingly *Miss Saigon*’s most direct confrontation with Vietnam’s legacy, especially when one considers that Chris is the creators’ metaphor for America. In this song, Chris’s angst, and emasculation over being unable to save Kim are parallel to ‘Vietnam Syndrome,’ the larger crisis of American confidence that occurred as a result of Vietnam. Despite having three years to heal, which Chris’s civilian wife thinks is enough, Chris grapples every day with the very real emotions surrounding the loss, gain, and subsequent loss of faith and hope he experienced surrounding the conflict. Like some other Americans who did not understand why their nation was involved in a war that reaped such heavy casualties, Chris also attests to never understanding the conflict, and subsequently feels a heavy sense of guilt for how his nation negatively affected their South Vietnamese allies or North Vietnamese former enemies. By grappling with his mental war about Vietnam, Chris is a vessel for audiences to understand and sympathize with the larger legacy of American involvement.

The other major way *Miss Saigon* engages with Vietnam war guilt is through the character of John, one of Chris’ Marine friends, who postwar works for an organization that reunites *bụi đời* children with their American fathers. The Act II opening number “Bui Doi” is a gospel song that criticizes America for her failure to care for these war orphans in a staged overindulgence of both American guilt and goodness. In the song, John sings about how the *bụi*

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<sup>34</sup> The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary revivals of *Miss Saigon* (West End 2014, Broadway 2017, and subsequent tours) featured a reworking of many lyrics, scenes, and scenery to reinforce the show’s grittiness and reflect changing cultural sensitivities. While some changes help drive in major points about the American experience in Vietnam, they do not do much to solve the show’s heavily racist overtones. “Confrontation” from *Miss Saigon: 25th Anniversary Performance*, directed by Laurence Connor and Brett Sullivan, (Universal Pictures Int’l Entertainment, NBC Universal, 2016).

*đòi* were “conceived in hell and born in strife [and] are the living reminders of all the good we failed to do” as Americans while a documentary reel of the impoverished Amerasian children plays on a screen upstage.<sup>35</sup> Evocative of an American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals commercial, “Bui Doi” works to both tug at the audience’s emotional heartstrings for the children left behind in Vietnam and also rouse audiences to pride for the patriotic American action in trying to save them. According to scholar Karen Shimakawa, “the curiously passive lament for ‘all the good we failed to do’ preempts the question of US responsibility or even agency” for Vietnam, as if good intentions can cover up all the messier questions of the war.<sup>36</sup> As if trying to make this belief a self-fulfilling prophecy, the song repeatedly reminds audiences that while there were missteps in the Vietnam intervention, America was then and was still trying its best to do well by Vietnamese civilians. While there are layers of truth to this in how America helped postwar, such as the United States Refugee Act of 1980 which helped US entry for Vietnamese refugees, the song still romanticizes American aid without truly examining any deeper consequences. Effectively, the criticism of America in “Bui Doi” is overshadowed and softened through the song’s self-centered overtones that background Vietnamese catastrophe and foreground America’s great guilt, remorse, and efforts to make amends.

The American characters in *Miss Saigon* also try to justify to one another their actions and the failure of Americans in Vietnam, to effectively soothe American war guilt and let themselves off the hook for the consequences of the war. A notable example of this is during a musical number, “Kim’s Nightmare” which recreates the Fall of Saigon onstage. During the number, the US Embassy has closed and American service members are taking the last

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<sup>35</sup> Schönberg, *Miss Saigon*, 221–2.

<sup>36</sup> Karen Shimakawa, *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage* (Durnham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002), 37.

helicopters out of Saigon while Vietnamese civilians wail en masse at the gates with their processing papers in hopes of escaping from the city before the PAVN and the Viet Cong capture the capital.<sup>37</sup> As Chris desperately tries to find Kim in the crowd and avoids evacuation, John forces Chris to get on the helicopter, leaving her behind. To try and urge Chris to leave Vietnam, John proclaims, “It’s not you, it’s war that cruel” and “Wake up, my friend your mercy trip has failed. There’s nothing you can do. That ship has sailed. She’s not the only one we’ll have betrayed.”<sup>38</sup> When one considers that the writers saw Chris as a “metaphor for America,” John’s words provide a conciliatory message for the nation in terms of their wartime legacy.<sup>39</sup> John blames the Vietnamese people’s suffering on the horrors of war and discounts any American or individual responsibility in Vietnam, even though it was American escalation in 1965 that expanded the conflict into a full-scale war.<sup>40</sup> While acknowledging the failures of American strategic policies to resolve the conflict, it still paints American presence as a ‘mercy trip’ to help people who could not help themselves and reinforces the white savior narrative.

This is further emphasized by the musical’s coup de théâtre, the Fall of Saigon and the onstage helicopter, which is heavily featured in the show’s marketing material and cultural associations. According to one of the scenic designers of the *Miss Saigon* revival, Totie Kinley, “It’s not a show about a helicopter. That’s what everyone thinks when they think of *Saigon*”

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<sup>37</sup> The Fall of Saigon marked the end of the Vietnam War, led to the reunification of Vietnam into the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and began the Indochina Refugee crisis as Vietnamese fled the country from 1975 to the 1990s.

<sup>38</sup> Schönberg, *Miss Saigon*, 297–9.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Maltby Jr. quoted in Vermette, *The Musical World of Boublil and Schönberg*, 81.

<sup>40</sup> Under President Johnson, American policy in Vietnam shifted away from limited funding, equipping and military advising in 1965. Earlier policy was dedicated to defense and protecting South, but the newer offensive stance focused on armed reconnaissance, retaliatory air strikes, and increased military pressure to destabilize North Vietnam and win the war. The expansion had limited strategic success as Americans killed many enemy soldiers but failed to completely destroy or halt their operations and would lead to higher personnel commitments and death tolls on both sides.; Fredrik Logevall, “Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2004): 100-3, accessed June 27, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27552566>.

despite it only being on stage for a few moments.<sup>41</sup> The fact that everyone thinks the musical is about the helicopter is important because this highlights how even outside of the libretto, the show's cultural impact is centered on its representation of American involvement and good-intentioned rescue efforts. Thus, through the helicopter, the musical's main selling point becomes the spectacle of American guilt by showcasing Vietnamese poverty, destitution, and victimization in juxtaposition to the industrial capital and might of an America who cannot do anything more to help and must flee in the face of communist terror.

While *Miss Saigon* handles much of Vietnam's legacy in an arguably poor way that dismisses America's wartime failures, it does grapple with important war and society questions in ways that previous musicals had not engaged with. In *Wartime: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences*, historian Mary L. Dudziak describes that "in wartime thinking, the future is a place beyond war, a time where exceptional measures can be put to rest, and regular life resumed."<sup>42</sup> There is a tendency to believe that when a peace treaty is signed that war is over, but wars do not end on these dates. The Vietnam War did not end with the Fall of Saigon; it forever altered the lives of refugees, veterans, and others who lived each day with the consequences. In "Bui Doi," John, a former Marine, attests how "war isn't over when it ends [as] some pictures never leave your mind" and that "like all survivors, I once thought when I'm home I won't give a damn, But now I know I'm caught, I'll never leave Vietnam."<sup>43</sup> Unlike earlier Golden Age musicals that do not deal with the consequences of war, *Miss Saigon* highlights the impacts of conflicts beyond death tolls and instead focuses on the individual and collective postwar experience. This discussion can partially be attributed to the government and general

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<sup>41</sup> Totie Kinley quoted in Diep Tran, "So, About Miss Saigon's Real Onstage Helicopter..." *Playbill*, March 9, 2017, accessed June 27, 2021, <https://www.playbill.com/article/so-about-miss-saigons-real-onstage-helicopter>.

<sup>42</sup> Mary L. Dudziak, *Wartime: An Idea, Its History, Its Consequences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 22.

<sup>43</sup> Schönberg, *Miss Saigon*, 216–7.



public's overemphasis of wartime trauma and postwar healing that came with 'Vietnam Syndrome', which was a vastly different phenomenon than how veterans were treated following the Second World War. While the postwar impact was romanticized in *Miss Saigon* with patriotic justifications, its inclusion is still an important step that paves the way for future musicals like *Bandstand* (Richard Oberacker and Robert Taylor, 2017), which endeavors to authentically grapple with postwar experiences and contest war mythology.

### ***Orientalism On Stage: Fetishizing and Racializing Vietnam***

*"[Miss Saigon] fits perfectly into the way that Americans, and Europeans, have imagined the Vietnam War as a racial and sexual fantasy that negates the war's political significance and Vietnamese subjectivity and agency."*<sup>44</sup>

While *Miss Saigon* educates audiences on the legacy of Vietnam, the war it looks at is a profoundly American one that subsumes the Vietnamese people into another nation's history. Instead of seeing Republic of Vietnam (AVRN) soldiers or civilians engaged in the war or defending the capital before it fell, every Vietnamese person in *Miss Saigon* is presented as one of four archetypes: prostitute, derelict, communist, or capitalist sleazeball. *Miss Saigon's* inauthentic portrayal of the Vietnamese people and fetishization of Asian women has been criticized by several Asian theatre scholars and fans and has even generated protests such as at Minnesota's Ordway Theater in 2013.<sup>45</sup> However, as the thirteenth longest-running Broadway show as of March 15, 2020 (the date most theaters shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic), *Miss Saigon's* cultural legacy regarding the racializing of war in Southeast Asia and creating a

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<sup>44</sup> Viet Thanh Nguyen, quoted in Tran, "I Am Miss Saigon, and I Hate It."

<sup>45</sup> Carey Purcell, "The Heat Is On: Touring Production of Miss Saigon Met with Protests at Minnesota's Ordway Theater," *Playbill*, October 8, 2013, accessed June 6, 2021, <https://www.playbill.com/article/the-heat-is-on-touring-production-of-miss-saigon-met-with-protests-at-minnesotas-ordway-theater-com-210375>.

narrative centered around othering the Vietnamese people cannot go unexamined.<sup>46</sup> Orientalism infused writings about the Vietnam War as it unfolded. Print journalism of the war was similar to Western colonial writings and “described Saigon as a feminized place largely defined by sensual pleasure.” The historical conflation of Southeast Asia with sexuality persists to this day.<sup>47</sup> It also was the late Vietnam War era that motivated Edward W. Said’s to write *Orientalism*, highlighting that there is a clear precedent in the way the conflict is discussed in Western literature.<sup>48</sup> That being said, the white creators of *Miss Saigon* did not try to contest this narrative. Instead, they capitalized on it. As Alan Boublil and Claude-Michel Schönberg are both French, their nation’s history of French colonialism in Asia and Africa made them “at ease with the dichotomy within the show, between the fatalistic Oriental side and the materialistic Occidental side” and found themselves “putting [their] own words into [Kim’s] mouth.”<sup>49</sup> In interviews, the creators have also used language like “oriental” and “exotic” to describe Kim’s character and beauty, demonstrating that they too subscribe to the show’s Orientalist rhetoric.<sup>50</sup>

*Miss Saigon*’s creators did not hide the Orientalist overtones in their musical’s narrative and have attested to it as a large part of the show’s construction. For example, in an interview, Boublil noted that in *Miss Saigon* the “images of the sun and moon, which represent Chris and Kim, also symbolize the opposition between East and West.”<sup>51</sup> Schönberg also discussed that he composed the score so that one can “hear the clash between two cultures” at play.<sup>52</sup> American

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<sup>46</sup> Playbill Staff, “Longest-Running Shows on Broadway” *Playbill*, March 9, 2020, accessed June 6, 2021, <https://www.playbill.com/article/long-runs-on-broadway-com-109864>.

<sup>47</sup> Jeffrey A. Keith, “Producing ‘Miss Saigon’: Imaginings, Realities, and the Sensual Geography of Saigon,” *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 22, no. 3 (2015): 244. accessed June 6, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43898425>.

<sup>48</sup> Keith, “Producing ‘Miss Saigon,’” 243–4.

<sup>49</sup> Edward Behr and Mark Steyn, *The Story of Miss Saigon*, (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1991), 34.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Maltby Jr., quoted in Vermette, *The Musical World of Boublil and Schönberg*, 85.

<sup>51</sup> Alan Boublil, quoted in Vermette, *The Musical World of Boublil and Schönberg*, 59.

<sup>52</sup> Claude-Michel Schönberg, quoted in Vermette, *The Musical World of Boublil and Schönberg*, 43.

GIs are often associated musically with jazz instrumentation with the Vietnamese characters with music from the region including bamboo reed woodwinds and plucked string instruments like the Đàn tranh. While Southeast Asian instruments might be expected, the heavy musical association between the light, whimsical, melodic music that Western audiences would associate with ‘Asia’ and Kim, whom *Miss Saigon* paints as the innocent rural beauty that the Westerner wishes to save, is oftentimes discomfiting. The writers’ obsession with East-versus-West becomes omnipresent on stage and it is even clearer which culture’s superiority is touted. One Vietnamese scholar wrote the following in a blog post after seeing the 25<sup>th</sup>-anniversary revival production, which was allegedly reworked to better reflect changing cultural sensitivities and be grittier:

This is a story by White writers, for White audiences. They tout the Vietnamese as the mysterious, backwards, and victims who can’t help themselves. They make audiences feel better for the mistakes the United States made during the war without really holding the U.S. accountable. It misrepresents so much of the history in favor of romanticism; it’s painful when you know the truth of it all.<sup>53</sup>

The first of the four stereotypes portrayed in *Miss Saigon* is ultra-sexualized women who feed into what dance scholar Wong Yutian argues is *Miss Saigon*’s “effeminized and infantized Asia [that] serve[s] as a low-budget whorehouse for the West.”<sup>54</sup> Outside of nameless impoverished ensemble characters, every Asian woman in the show engages in sex work of some kind as bargirls and prostitutes. With the exception of the idealized and innocent Kim, all the women are scantily clad in bikinis and singing about sensuality with little reference to how or why they ended up plying their trade in Saigon. From oral history accounts of Vietnamese bargirls, some did so to “escape from the drudgery of traditional village life” and formed a “tight-knit network of babysitters and companions” based on shared occupation and experience

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<sup>53</sup> Castanien, “Stories for Us.”

<sup>54</sup> Yutian Wong, *Choreographing Asian America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 214.

in the city.<sup>55</sup> However, the bargirls of *Miss Saigon*'s Dreamland do not achieve enough characterization to even have this. Their common trait, outside of their promiscuity, is the desire to escape to America with a GI and live what Boublil and Schönberg see as the "Movie in Their Mind." Opportunistic, desperate, and at times aggressive, the women beg the American men to take them to America. When they are rebuked for it, they lament about the "dream [the GIs] leave behind" of fleeing their lives and country "in a strong GI's embrace."<sup>56</sup> Even though some women historically felt liberated by the act of being bargirls, *Miss Saigon*'s bargirls are oppressed, depressed, and robbed of their agency as their mere function is to beg and wait for an American man to save them from their misery.<sup>57</sup>

The only bargirl presented to be worthy of saving is Kim, who is still virginal and abhors sex work, which is supposed to elevate her from the other bargirls. While Kim exercises agency in moments like killing her communist fiancée Thuy, she is still forced into sex work from the age of seventeen because and continues being a bargirl out of desperation and destitution up until she dies to save her son. By highlighting how even 'good' girls like Kim were victimized by the intersection of war and sex work, *Miss Saigon* further appeals to American morality and war guilt and uses Vietnamese women as props to do so.

In addition to the bargirls, the musical features an ensemble of destitute and impoverished city dwellers in Saigon who plays into the musical's white savior narrative and victimization of the Vietnamese people. Akin to Rudyard Kipling's poem "The White Man's Burden" about colonial adventurism in Africa, *Miss Saigon* too centers around the idea that white Westerners'

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<sup>55</sup> Mai Lan Gustafsson, "'Freedom. Money. Fun. Love.': The Warlore of Vietnamese Bargirls," *The Oral History Review* 38, no. 2 (2011): 320–3. accessed June 6, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41440905>.

<sup>56</sup> "Movie in My Mind" from the *Miss Saigon: 25th Anniversary Performance.*, Schönberg, *Miss Saigon*, 216–7.

<sup>57</sup> Mai Lan Gustafsson, "'Freedom. Money. Fun. Love.'"

job is to uplift and save colonized and formerly colonized people from their destitution. The local people are shown to constantly beg and harass soldiers in the street, seeing American men as the only ticket out of Vietnam. At this point of the war, American military forces were limited in their activities, so only Republic of Vietnam soldiers remained to stall the PAVN and Viet Cong forces. Despite this, the AVRN is neither seen nor mentioned onstage in the fight to protect the nation and its people. The Vietnamese people are presented as unable to help themselves, which contributes to the musical's overindulgence of American war guilt. By privileging Vietnamese tragedy over agency and backgrounding a population from their own nation's history, audiences are led to feel amplified remorse for American interventionism and adventurism in Southeast Asia. This similarly heightens the sense of American betraying in scenes like "Kim's Nightmare," where dozens of Vietnamese people are shown to sob and wail at the embassy gates as the last American helicopter leaves and the lights fade out. Vietnamese theatre scholar Diep Tran addressed this victimization in an article for *American Theatre*:

If [Miss Saigon] was trying to tell the story of Vietnamese people, we did not recognize ourselves or our parents in any of the faces we were seeing on that stage. Instead, all we could see were desperate, pathetic victims—people who were completely different from the resilient, courageous, multifaceted men and women of Little Saigon.<sup>58</sup>

*Miss Saigon* also pairs Vietnamese victimization with Vietnamese hatred towards their nationality and ethnic heritage. According to the musical's British director Nicholas Hytner, "the thing that is so real in the show is the Vietnamese characters' burning ambition not to be Vietnamese anymore," which is reflected best in the character of the Engineer.<sup>59</sup> The Engineer, who serves as the show's male Vietnamese lead, is presented as a depraved pimp and bar owner

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<sup>58</sup> Deip, "I Am Miss Saigon, and I Hate It."

<sup>59</sup> Nicholas Hytner, quoted in Vermette, *The Musical World of Boublil and Schönberg*, 151.

whose main goal in life is to leave Vietnam and be an even bigger and greedier pimp in America. He is staunchly capitalist as a contrast to the show's communist antagonist Thuy, despite being sent to a re-education camp after Vietnamese reunification. The Engineer sings that "Wherever I go, I speak Uncle Ho and think Uncle Sam."<sup>60</sup> Similarly, in "If You Want to Die in Bed," the Engineer laments, "Why was I born of a race that thinks only of rice and hates entrepreneurs? ... I should be...American! Where every promise lands and every businessman knows where he stands."<sup>61</sup> The Engineer believes that there is something inherently 'wrong' with being Vietnamese and sees in the ravages of American capitalism the one thing that will bring him happiness and salvation, making it abundantly clear what the white Western creative team believes in or chooses to present to the audience. By juxtaposing imagery of an agrarian, undeveloped, communist Vietnam with an industrially wealthy, developed, and capitalist America, the lyrics work to culturally other these former and present the latter as something to yearn for. The Engineer's characterization highlights how *Miss Saigon* subscribes to American exceptionalism and the racist notion that being Vietnamese is a culture one should separate oneself from instead of taking pride in.

However, the Engineer's desire to be an American is also presented as something comedic because he is such a sleazy character, and theatre scholar Shimakawa argues that this reinforces the notion he isn't "one of us" and never will be.<sup>62</sup> In "The American Dream" the Engineer does not sing about traditional American values and possesses merely material reasons for coming to America. His dream is presented in a weirdly dystopian larger-than-life musical number. While the song can be seen as a critique of American greed and over-sexualization, the

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<sup>60</sup> Schönberg, *Miss Saigon*, 124–5.

<sup>61</sup> Schönberg, *Miss Saigon*, 188–9.

<sup>62</sup> Shimakawa, *National Abjection*, 42–3.

uncomfortable disconnect between conventional associations of the American Dream and the Engineer's ideals serves as the number's focal point. The Engineer is not the rustic immigrant story that people want to see about hard-working foreigners trying to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and make something of themselves in America through freedom, inclusion, and democracy: He just wants to sell more sex in a country where sex sells best. Thus, the musical not only presents that being Vietnamese is a problem but also shows that Vietnamese people, outside of the *bụi đời* assimilated into American society by their GI fathers, can never truly be or understand what it means to be an American, meaning there is no true place for them.

The only Vietnamese characters who do not wish to be saved by Americans or become Americans are those who support the PAVN and Viet Cong soldiers who are represented by Thuy in *Miss Saigon*. Kim's former betrothed, Thuy is a turncoat from a Southern Vietnamese village who eventually joined the Viet Cong near the end of the conflict and becomes a Commissar after the nation's reunification. He and the rest of the soldiers are presented as abusive, strict, hyper-nationalist militarists in the number "Morning of the Dragon" and subsequent scenes. Thuy is a one-dimensional and cartoonishly evil foil to Chris who orders his men to beat Kim for the "dishonor[ing] the national name" and being "an American's whore."<sup>63</sup> Thuy feels entitled to Kim because of tradition and will go so far as to try and kill Kim's child to stake his claim, making him the man that Chris, and by association America, needs to protect the rest of the Vietnamese from.<sup>64</sup> By creating an unnuanced caricature of a bad communist to exploits his countrymen, *Miss Saigon* works to further victimize the Vietnamese people in the narrative and harp upon the war guilt for not being able to defend them.

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<sup>63</sup> Schönberg, *Miss Saigon*, 159.

<sup>64</sup> Shimakawa, *National Abjection*, 34.

Every Vietnamese character in *Miss Saigon* is not there to tell an authentic narrative; they are there to tell a romanticized American narrative that fits within Orientalist notions of the international interventionism that have been in place since the nation's colonial era. Instead of standing alongside Americans to fight, the Vietnamese characters rely upon and beg the Americans to save them from destitution and communists and bring them to a better life filled with children, money, ice cream, and basic luxuries, thereby losing their agency in the conflict. While the narrative itself was constructed to other Vietnam from America, many of the characters wish to do this themselves and are not proud of their identity. All of this serves to heighten *Miss Saigon*'s focal tragedy, that despite America's best intentions the nation could not be the hero it wished in Vietnam and was only left with postwar guilt and suffering.

### ***Grappling with Wartime Gravity***

Overall, war-focused musical theatre of the 1960s to 1990s was shaped by the legacy of the Vietnam War both as the conflict progressed and after the fact. Filled with guilt and disillusionment, these shows endeavored to make meaning out of the death tolls, draft riots, and government scandals of the era by engaging with them in a gilded manner. These musicals used elements such as the nudity and sexuality that came out of 1960s counterculture to provide the showbiz that helped cushion deeper war and society questions that these shows posed such as conscription and if and when wars truly end. Instead of relegating death and violence off-stage, audiences are forced to grapple with corpses, gun violence, and brutality. *Miss Saigon* is similar, as it serves as a venue to process American feelings about the Vietnam War.

However, it is also notably different seeing that *Miss Saigon* is a product of almost two decades of historical retrospective and reconstruction whereas *Hair* and *Cabaret* emerged during the war itself and were reactions and reflections upon the sociopolitical context of the times that



created them. By the 1990s, the overemphasis on American guilt and of reframing of Vietnam veterans as victims from the war, as opposed to perpetrators, changed how people viewed the recent war and tried to make meaning of it. Whereas earlier shows foregrounded the ideological threats, government corruption, and anti-war sentiment that defined the war in the late 1960s, *Miss Saigon* does not wish to deeply engage with this historical past outside of offhand manners. It instead exploits Vietnamese trauma and soothes American regret to neatly package the war into an unnuanced and ultimately tragic American spectacle that can easily be consumed. The shift from having a conversation about conflict to commemoration and condolences in Vietnam War-related musicals highlight how fluid war memory can be, even over a short period of time.

The timing of *Miss Saigon*'s Broadway premiere and its legacy for Vietnam War memory is almost ironic, as *New York Times* theater critic Frank Rich remarks in his review from 1991. He writes, "Miss Saigon insists on revisiting the most calamitous and morally dubious military adventure in American history, and through an unfortunate act of timing, arrives in New York even as jingoistic celebrations of a successful war or going full blast."<sup>65</sup> A little over a month before the show opened on April 11, 1991, the United States was victorious in the incredibly short Persian Gulf War, a conflict that "seemed the perfect therapy for what remained of the lingering illness of Vietnam."<sup>66</sup> The Persian Gulf War reinvigorated American confidence in the nation's role on the international stage as a nation that "lead[s] crusades of good versus evil," and even President George Bush Sr. claimed postwar that "By God, we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Rich, "Miss Saigon Arrives, from the Old School."

<sup>66</sup> Herring, "Reflecting the Last War," 44–5.

<sup>67</sup> Herring, "Reflecting the Last War," 44–5.

Thus, it is fitting that *Miss Saigon* provides a tidy yet overblown sendoff to the Vietnam War on the Gulf War's heels. More than anything, *Miss Saigon* is a vessel through which Americans can process their Vietnam War guilt in a way that highlights some of the horrors, while also using gratuitous sexualization and romanticization to downplay the impact. Once the Vietnam War and American guilt were processed in a successful and popular megamusical, why retread the ground? *Miss Saigon*, like the Persian Gulf War, provides an ideal bookend for Vietnam War syndrome and its legacy being discussed on the Broadway stage.<sup>68</sup> The legacy of several American wars would not be engaged with again until the 21<sup>st</sup> century where the War on Terror and a re-examination of American identity and history would prompt the writing of musicals for the Broadway stage that rewrite war memory and correct war mythology.

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<sup>68</sup> The one major exception is the Off-Broadway Vietnam era musical, *Dogfight* (Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, 2012) surrounding a romance between a young Marine and a waitress in San Francisco the last night before a group of Marines ship out to Vietnam in 1963. While a touching piece, it falls victim to romanticizing the era like *Miss Saigon* almost two decades later and did not find large commercial success or widespread impact as its main runs were limited to Off-Broadway and Off-West End contexts.

#### **Chapter IV – *Allegiance:* Rewriting War Memory & Mythology (2000s-Present Day)**

Thus far, twenty-first-century America has been defined by the state of perpetual war that has arisen out of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks and the War on Terror. While American military forces have been constantly engaged in the Middle East, the nation has also spent time re-examining its internal life as minority groups have fought for the freedoms and liberties they have been systemically denied. Examining the structures that underlie past and ongoing injustices has cast light on less savory elements of American history in war and at peace. One major example includes the nation's historic racism against Asian peoples, most clearly highlighted by the Japanese American incarceration experience during World War II. Similarly, the United States has been criticized for breaking the very moral and ethical values it purports to uphold. For example, the nation's leaders refuse to ratify several important political and human rights treaties while claiming to champion freedom. For example, the United States violated the Charter of the United Nations by waging war without Security Council Approval with the 2003 invasion of Iraq.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the War on Terror seldom yielded clear victories. With more distance from the past and a resolution to look inward, historians and media at large have attempted to bust myths of American exceptionalism and infallibility now that the gilding has worn thin.

Even if a war ended decades in the past, those who lived through it carry a defined vision of what the war was and what it personally meant to them, especially in the case of World War

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<sup>1</sup> The UN Charter is the United Nation's founding document that was signed on June 26, 1945. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter typically bans the use of force by states unless it meets certain conditions such as an armed attack against one's country. Without this in place, legal force needs to be sanctioned by the UN Security Council, but America has violated this in plain sight, such as the Shayrat missile strike on April 7, 2017 (Anu Bradford and Eric A. Posner, "Universal Exceptionalism in International Law," *Harvard International Law Journal* 52, No. 1 [2011]: 3-4).

II. These personal experiences work to keep war memory static, despite the years of scholarship that work to nuance it and make it more inclusive. An example of this was the 1995 *Enola Gay* controversy which surrounded the Smithsonian's intended display of the Boeing B-29 Superfortress bomber that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. The Smithsonian's proposed display would have encouraged visitors to "analyze the Hiroshima bombing and wrestle with the horrors and dangers of the nuclear arms race."<sup>2</sup> Conversely, veterans groups wanted the display to be purely commemorating as the planned exhibit, which questioned the bomb's usage, would obscure their wartime sacrifice. In the end, the controversy surrounding an exhibit that was "caught between history and memory" was solved but the "commemorative voice prevailed over the historical voice" because of the former's group's larger political pull.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the nuanced exhibition was censored to "defend a conventional, patriotic picture of the past."<sup>4</sup> However, when these custodians of memory pass on, it leaves more room for historians' voices to reemerge to reexamine the past because personal memory and national history of the period are not as directly at odds.

Twenty-first-century musical theatre has also responded in kind to modern conflicts by supplying counternarratives to war memory and mythology surrounding past conflicts, most notably the Second World War. As a result of much more historical distance from World War II, current musical theatre tells more niche and nuanced war stories based on war and society topics like the effects on the home front, displacement of civilians, and what happens after wars end. Similarly, as American society has been caught in an age of perpetual war where militarization is normalized, critical artistic pieces about more distant wars that are less personal to modern

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<sup>2</sup> Michael J. Hogan, "The Enola Gay Controversy: History, Memory, and the Politics of Presentation," in *Hiroshima in History and Memory*, ed. Michel J. Hogan, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 205.

<sup>3</sup> Hogan, "The Enola Gay Controversy," 229.

<sup>4</sup> Hogan, "The Enola Gay Controversy," 202.

civilians can serve as cautionary tales for American society. The three musicals that have had a heavy hand in reexamining the legacies of past wars and attempt to nuance them are *Allegiance* (Jay Kuo, 2015), *Bandstand* (Richard Oberacker, Robert Taylor, 2017), and *Alice by Heart* (Duncan Sheik, Steven Sater, 2019).

The mythology and romanticism of the Greatest Generation are some of the most historically resonant myths of the Second World War, which the 2017 musical *Bandstand* tackles head-on. *Bandstand* follows a Pacific War veteran with PTSD, Donny Novitski, as he puts together a band of former servicemen to compete in a National Radio Swing Band Competition in Tribute to the Troops. Throughout the musical, the Donny Nova Band constantly butts heads with America's romanticized image of veterans' experiences and belief that life postwar will return to normal. The band realizes that as veterans they must fight for themselves, as America will not fight for them. At the show's climax, the veterans present the American public with a raw, unspoken, and realistic portrait of the struggles that veterans face when coming home from war. This is in stark contrast to the image of the Greatest Generation and the associated myth that only veterans from "bad" wars like Vietnam "suffered lasting adjustment problems" and had "few qualms about the war" once they had returned home.<sup>5</sup> For many veterans and associated military personnel, their reintegration into society was burdened with unresolved trauma and the inability to be heard in a society that only celebrated the war's benefits and triumphs. There was a disconnect between combat veterans compared to the entirety of American civilians, who had not experienced home front bombings and were inundated by positive propaganda. *Bandstand* seeks to reverse the dominant narrative.

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<sup>5</sup> Michael C.C. Adams, *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 148.

*Bandstand* is also a significant show because it sports the most accurate portrayal of veterans in the musical theatre medium, separating it from all other war musicals. It was the first musical certified by Got Your Six, which advocates for better representation of veterans in the media. The show endeavored, first and foremost, to truly represent the experience of veterans. To do this, real veterans and war bereaved were included in the creative process to help the actors better understand the weight of their characters' conditions and the story they were telling. As *Bandstand* centers around a group of veterans, each band member contributes a unique service experience to a more holistic and impactful representation of veterans in media. While the members of the Donny Nova Band share a love of swing music and use it as a coping mechanism, they all have individualized trauma such as PTSD, traumatic brain injuries, and alcoholism, that can resonate with different aspects of the veteran community. Productions of *Bandstand* additionally engage with the veteran community through outreach, such as with the non-profit organization Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), to practice the message the show preaches offstage.

Moving the gaze away from American war mythology as well as combatants, *Alice by Heart* challenges the British myth of "Blitz Spirit" and provides a more realistic account of civilian experiences during the London Blitz of World War II through the eyes of an adolescent. Based on the Lewis Carroll novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *Alice by Heart* is set in a London Underground station that has been converted into a civilian shelter during the Blitz. The story follows the teenage Alice Spencer who utilizes the book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as a means of escapism, as she copes with the air raids and the concurrent tragedy of her friend Alfred Hallam dying from tuberculosis.

“Blitz Spirit” is centered around the idea of “Britain’s wartime stoicism” and the shared courage, calmness, and perseverance exhibited by British citizens in a time of great destruction and despair.<sup>6</sup> In popular memory, there is a heavy focus on “images of popular courage and endurance” during this time period and how this “trial by explosives and fire” helped form a cohesive British identity.<sup>7</sup> Contrary to the period’s propaganda, *Alice by Heart* highlights tensions within bomb shelters, displacement of civilian populations, and the weight of grief and loss on ordinary Britons’ resolve. The show also stages the “Blitz Spirit” myth physically, as the show’s villain, the Red Cross Nurse, embodies wartime stoicism within the bunker while the heroine, Alice, represents the opposite as she copes with loss in an emotional and self-centered manner.

*Alice by Heart* also parallels the physical displacement of those ravaged by war to the imagined mental displacement of those trying to cope with its horrors, as Alice seeks to leave her bleak reality and escape into a fantasy. While Alice tries to escape through her imagination over the course of the musical, reality is always there to disrupt and remind her that she cannot escape it forever. In numerous instances of the show, the illusion of Wonderland is shattered by air raid sirens and Alfred’s worsening medical situation, which forces Alice to process her emotions in the real-time trauma of the Blitz.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the show, there is also omnipresent bunker imagery to illustrate how even when Alice escapes her war-torn world through the power of imagination, the world she is trying to leave behind still weighs upon her mental state. Overall, *Alice by Heart* contests British strength and solidarity during wartime and highlights the

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Overly, “Why the Cruel Myth of the ‘Blitz Spirit’ Is No Model for How to Fight Coronavirus,” *The Guardian*, March 19, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey Fields, “Nights Underground in Darkest London. The Blitz, 1940-1941,” *Cercles* 17 (2007): 212-5, accessed March 28, 2021, <http://www.cercles.com/n17/special/field.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Steven Sater and Jessie Nelson, Unpublished libretto of *Alice by Heart*, 31, 45, 54.

displacement of people because of war, both physically in a bomb shelter and mentally through using escapism and the imagination. Through forgoing mythology and romanticism, the musical delivers a more personal, realistic account of an adolescent civilian's London Blitz experience, adding nuance to the Second World War's portrayal onstage. While both *Bandstand* and *Alice by Heart* strongly engage with the impact of war on more niche groups like civilians and veterans and question the mythology of World War II, only Jay Kuo's *Allegiance* would grapple with American wartime misconduct against its own civilians by staging the Japanese American incarceration experience.

### ***Case Study: Jay Kuo's Allegiance (2015)***

*Allegiance* is a Broadway musical presented at the Longacre Theatre in New York in 2015 with music and lyrics by Jay Kuo, book by Jay Kuo, Marc Acito, and Lorenzo Thione, and direction by Stafford Arima. Originally staged at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre in 2012, *Allegiance* follows the Japanese American Kimura family who is forcibly incarcerated during the Second World War at the Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Wyoming after President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066.<sup>9</sup> Inspired by the incarceration experience of actor and activist George Takei, *Allegiance* is the first Broadway show to tell the story of this moment in America's history and is arguably one of the first mainstream artistic pieces to do so.<sup>10</sup> *Allegiance* highlights many key elements of the Japanese American World War II and

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<sup>9</sup> Executive Order 9066 was issued on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1942. It ordered people who could be considered national security threats moved inland from the West Coast, which would result in the incarceration of Japanese Americans. For more information see: Executive Order 9066, February 19, 1942, General Records of the United States Government, Record Group 11, National Archives, [https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc\\_large\\_image.php?flash=false&doc=74](https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc_large_image.php?flash=false&doc=74).

<sup>10</sup> Historically, there have been many terms used to describe the Japanese American incarceration experience during World War II. For example, most people typically describe the experience using phrases like "evacuation" and "internment" which do not accurately describe the forced removal and incarceration that happened historically. This project follows the language recommendations from the Japanese Americans Citizens League's *Power of Words Handbook: A Guide to Language about Japanese Americans in World War II: Understanding Euphemisms and Preferred Terminology*. The handbook can be found at:



incarceration experience, including but not limited to the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team, conflicts between the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) and Japanese American draft resisters, and the camp experience itself. The show centers both around the perseverance of the Japanese American community formed at Heart Mountain as well as the divisions amongst the community regarding military service and the loyalty questionnaire issued by the War Department and War Relocation Authority (WRA).

The plot centers around the tensions within the Kimura family when they are incarcerated at the Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Park County, Wyoming. Sammy Kimura, a college student wants to serve his country by fighting for the Japanese American segregated fighting unit, the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team, against his family's wishes. He also falls in love with the camp's white nurse, Hannah Campbell, which is societally unacceptable and further distancing him from the rest of his community. Alternatively, Sammy's sister, Kei, falls in love with Frankie Suzuki, the organizer of the camp's draft resistance movement and a vocal critic of the JACL's policies. During the Kimura family's incarceration, the War Department and WRA issues a loyalty questionnaire to root out those deemed threats to national security and transfers them to the Tule Lake Relocation Center. Historically, Questions 27 and 28 on the questionnaire were used to determine one's allegiance. Question 27 asked if the respondent would serve the United States during the war in combat duty or other means, such as the Auxiliary Nurse Corps. Question 28 asked if the respondent would swear unqualified allegiance to America and forswear allegiance to the Japanese emperor. When the Kimura family fills out their loyalty questionnaire

and Tatsuo, Sammy and Kei's father, answers "No" to questions 27 and 28, and becomes a political prisoner.<sup>11</sup>

After his father is transferred to the Tule Lake, Sammy joins the 442<sup>nd</sup> to help free him by proving their family's loyalty to America. In Europe, Sammy serves as a platoon leader in numerous campaigns and is wounded in action. When Frankie gets arrested for organizing draft riots and Kei works together with Hannah to rescue him, but when Frankie gets in a fight with a military policeman Hannah is accidentally killed by a serviceman in the crossfire. Once the war ends, Japanese American citizens are released from the camps and the Kimura family returns to San Francisco. There, Kei and Sammy fight over Hannah's death and the fact that Kei has married Frankie. As a result, Sammy becomes estranged from his family for years until he reunites with his niece Hanako after Kei's funeral, realizing that he has a second chance to reconnect with his family.

As a musical based on history, *Allegiance* needs to balance history, truth, and accuracy with entertainment and commercial appeal. Its attempt at doing so received mixed reviews in its New York run. The show was criticized for trying to tackle too much information in a way that struggled to resonate with audiences but was praised for the moving performances and its well-meaning attempt to stage this complex history authentically and inclusively. Also, *Allegiance* is the first musical created and directed by Asian Americans with a largely Asian American cast on Broadway. Previous shows with largely Asian casts like *Flower Drum Song* and *Miss Saigon* were created by non-Asian creators and have narratives tinged with Orientalism and exoticization.

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<sup>11</sup> Brian Niiya, "No-no boys," *Densho Encyclopedia*, accessed August 2, 2020, <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/No-no%20boys>.

While *Allegiance* only ran 37 previews and 111 performances on Broadway, the show was able to reach a substantial number of people.<sup>12</sup> According to writer Marc Acito, the “show reached 120,000 people...in New York and that number matches the same number of Japanese Americans interned during the war and that to me feels like each person who saw the show now can speak for somebody that history has neglected.”<sup>13</sup> Beyond its Broadway run, *Allegiance* has also found a wider audience for its story through the theatrical and online streaming release of the filmed production as well as through regional theater. The professional recording of *Allegiance* was granted limited theatrical release on three occasions, the first of which broke the record for being the highest-grossing one-night Broadway musical theatre screening and has subsequently been released on Broadway-related streaming services.<sup>14</sup>

*Allegiance* challenges notions of the ‘Good War’ by encouraging audiences to rethink America’s wartime conduct, outside the typical patriotic and heroic imagery, and understand the historical injustice of incarcerating 120,000 Japanese American citizens. As the first musical theatre representation of the incarceration experience, *Allegiance* addresses the complex realities of camp life as well as the unity and divisions within Japanese American camp communities. As opposed to treating Japanese American citizens as passive victims, *Allegiance* gives the incarcerated Japanese Americans agency in their story. This being said, *Allegiance* walks the fine

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<sup>12</sup> “Allegiance,” *Playbill*, New York City, New York, accessed July 25, 2020, <https://www.playbill.com/production/allegiance-longacre-theatre-vault-0000014103>.

<sup>13</sup> Marc Acito, quoted in *Allegiance: Beyond Broadway* (Sing Out Louise Productions, 2018), DVD.

<sup>14</sup> Two of these theatrical releases also coincided with important events related to the incarceration experience: February 19, 2017, the Japanese American Day of Remembrance and 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary Executive Order 9066; and December 4 and 11, 2017, which were close to the 76<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pearl Harbor bombings. The show also had its regional debut in Los Angeles in 2018, which was a collaboration with the East West Players and Los Angeles’ Japanese American Cultural & Community Center. Presented in the heart of Little Tokyo, the production featured members of the Broadway production, including George Takei, reprising their roles.; Deborah Vankin, “George Takei’s Broadway musical ‘Allegiance’ breaks a theater-screening record,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 6, 2017, accessed July 30, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-george-takei-screening-breaks-records-20170106-story.html>.

line between presenting history onstage and attempting to make sure non-Japanese Americans, especially white audiences, do not walk away feeling guilty or shameful over the historical past. By shining a light on the Japanese American incarceration experience in mainstream American theatre, *Allegiance* calls into question the black-and-white view of the ‘Good War.’

### ***The Good War? Negotiating Historical Myths and Realities Onstage***

While most of World War II memory glorifies America’s wartime heroism and downplays the country’s injustices, *Allegiance* is a major paradigm shift because it celebrates the agency and heroism of a marginalized minority despite being subjected to American wartime injustice. During the war, American propaganda sought to villainize and dehumanize the Japanese to help make it easier to justify violence against them in war and further create a clear dichotomy of “Good Allied Powers” versus the “Evil Axis Powers.” In military lingo and propaganda, the Japanese people were dehumanized into a “dwarfish but vicious species” of sub-human but powerful animals that made “desirable trophies” when tortured and killed.<sup>15</sup> Americans lost sight of the humanity of Japanese people, including those who were living within American borders during the war, contributing to further xenophobic damage and the creation of an American system of concentration camps.<sup>16</sup> After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the US government feared espionage and threats to national security within America’s borders, and

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 120.

<sup>16</sup> According to the previously cited Japanese Americans Citizens League’s *Power of Words* Handbook, American concentration camp is the recommended term over relocation center. While American concentration camps are distinct from those of the Nazis, the term was originally used during the Spanish-American and Boer Wars to discuss places where people imprisoned for an aspect of their identity. All instances of concentration camps are different, but all refer to a place where “the people in power removed a minority group from the general population and the rest of society let it happen.” Thus, as what happened to Japanese Americans in World War II follows this model, the term is recommended to correctly attribute the historical injustice that occurred.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt authorized the forced removal of those deemed threats from the coast to inland “detention” centers.<sup>17</sup>

Whether the Japanese American civilians were first-generation emigrants (*issei*) or second-generation citizens (*nisei*), entire communities were forcibly relocated to American concentration camps like Heart Mountain and Tule Lake because of perceived race alone. Unlike the romantic and patriotic ‘Good War’ musicals of the 1940s and 1950s, the Japanese American incarceration does not fit well into an America-serving myth of the war, so it is often not discussed. In the documentary *Allegiance to Broadway*, George Takei comments that the Japanese American incarceration “is still a little-known story to most Americans, ...Europeans, ...and the people of Japan [and that] most Japanese Americans who went through that experience as adults did not discuss it with their children.”<sup>18</sup> Similar to the silence of the veterans who returned post-World War II, former incarcerated Japanese Americans not sharing their stories made it easier for American society to gloss over, if not ignore, the injustices committed against their community during the Second World War. Additionally, there is a culture of shame surrounding the historical event on both sides of the experience making it a difficult subject to handle in both education and art. Survivors have a strong sense of shame regarding their experiences while white Americans feel a sense of guilt for allowing it to happen. *Allegiance* tries to bridge this gap and start a constructive conversation. George Takei believes *Allegiance* “is [his] legacy...that will live on beyond [him] and Americans all across the country will hopefully get an understanding of how fragile our democracy is” through watching the musical.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Executive Order 9066, February 19, 1942.

<sup>18</sup> George Takei, quoted in *Allegiance to Broadway: The Dream. The Story. The Journey of a Musical*, directed by Greg Vander Veer (Sing Out Louise Productions, 2018), DVD.

<sup>19</sup> George Takei, quoted in *Allegiance: The Legacy*, (Sing Out Louise Productions, 2018), DVD.

Due to the culture of shame surrounding Japanese American incarceration, according to *Allegiance* co-librettist and producer, Lorenzo Thione, one of the hardest parts of writing and marketing the show to make it commercial was “dealing with the expectation that, especially white audiences are going to be shamed into guilt and submission by the show.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, *Allegiance* carefully balances aspects of the Japanese American incarceration are shown on stage versus what is mentioned only lyrically. Whereas key moments, such as the Hiroshima bombing are heavy, *Allegiance*’s creatives did not want to make the musical overly grim, fatalistic, or guilt-inducing throughout. According to librettist Marc Acito, “the internees were not this group of people who were being depressed while they were being oppressed” so the writers wanted to highlight how “even though they were under these incredibly dire circumstances, [Japanese Americans] were finding joy” by participating in activities like baseball games and dances.<sup>21</sup>

One of the ways *Allegiance* sought to combat this expectation was to present some of the show’s harsher historical truths in ironically upbeat ways that are laced with societal commentary. The best example of this irony is the song “Paradise,” a number sung by Frank Suzuki at the Heart Mountain Dance that openly criticizes Mike Masaoka and the JACL’s political strategies and illustrates harsh camp conditions. The first two verses are as follows:

*My fellow Americans, give me your tired, your poor...  
Your homes, your businesses, your money!  
Just mark yes to questions 27 and 28  
And I, Mike Masaoka, will let you stay right here, in paradise!*

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<sup>20</sup> Lorenzo Thione, quoted in *Allegiance to Broadway*.

<sup>21</sup> Marc Acito, quoted in *A Toast to Allegiance*, Broadway on Demand, May 29, 2020.

*Desert, swamp, or dusty waste, they say location's is key  
Sure you shiver in this icebox, but cheer up, rent is free  
And don't you love to freeze in line for soggy bowls of rice  
Just put up and shut up, 'cause you're in paradise  
Is everybody happy? (No!) Tough!*<sup>22</sup>

Musically, “Paradise” has a catchy jazz beat and an upbeat tone which heavily contradicts the gritty lyrics about everyday realities of Japanese American incarceration, such as the quality of food, weather, and military presence. The sarcasm-laced lyrics in Frankie’s satirical caricature of Mike Masaoka reveals the bitterness that some members of the Japanese American community felt towards the JACL’s accommodationist stance towards the WRA.<sup>23</sup> Performed at the Heart Mountain Dance in front of a large number of people, the brassy, flashy, big band number is a political statement to protest the loyalty questionnaire and highlight its ironies. “Paradise” is a way for both the characters in the show and for audiences to process some of the negative aspects of the Japanese American incarceration experience in a humorous and daring way. This lighthearted yet critical number reinforces the creators’ wishes to both showcase moments of finding communal joy in adversity while also highlighting camp injustices and realities.

Despite such moments, *Allegiance* does not shy away from portraying tragedy, trauma, and brutality onstage in ways that provoke audiences to think about questions of morality. In one scene, the infant of a young couple, Nan and Johnny Goto, passes away because the camp denied medical treatment for the child despite her having a 102° fever.<sup>24</sup> Later, the community holds a

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<sup>22</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione, (Sing Out Louise Productions, 2018), DVD.

<sup>23</sup> Mike Masaoka was the National Secretary and Field Executive to the JACL who insisted on cooperation with the WRA during the war and urged the formation of a Japanese Battalion to allow *nisei* to serve in World War II, which would become the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. Due to the controversial nature of his wartime actions as an alleged collaborationist, some sectors of the Japanese American community idolize Masaoka while others revile him. Thus, representing him onstage became an incredibly delicate task in the musical and was subject to many iterations to ensure he spoke for himself and was not too villainized or deprived of his historical legacy in the piece.

<sup>24</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

funeral for the dead child, as the scene symbolically “highlight[s] the true horror of the camps...through the eyes of that young couple.”<sup>25</sup> The scene where the Gotos sob over the casket is juxtaposed with a scene between JACL Liaison Mike Masaoka and Director Dillon Myer of the WRA, in which Masaoka further insists on the existence of a segregated fighting unit and further cooperation with the WRA. By having interwoven scenes in the camp and the government, the staging provides a harrowing look at the politics happening and the direct impact they have on the incarcerated populations.

Another key moment in the show presenting the realities of war is the 442<sup>nd</sup>'s rescue mission to find the 1st Battalion, 141st Infantry (36th Infantry Division), or “Lost Battalion” in the French Vosges Mountains that occurred from October 24<sup>th</sup> to October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1944.<sup>26</sup> During the battle, the 442<sup>nd</sup> endures constant enemy fire, and man upon man falls until Sammy Kimura, the last serviceman standing, goes down. When commenting on how the battle sequence was blocked, director Stafford Arima commented that “each of the actors would come forward to die and then would go back to come forward again to [make it] look like an endless wave of soldiers” as opposed to a small ensemble.<sup>27</sup> As opposed to earlier Golden Age musicals, such as *South Pacific* where combat and deaths in combat are relegated offstage, *Allegiance* showcases the senseless death and harsh realities of military service for the 442<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment and the war in general, which is noteworthy for a World War II-based musical. The show neither shies away from portraying death onstage nor away from commenting upon the senseless death toll in

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<sup>25</sup> Marc Acito quoted in the commentary track for *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

<sup>26</sup> The rescue mission Sammy and the 442<sup>nd</sup> take part in was a historic rescue mission performed by the 442<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Battalion to rescue 211 men from the 1st Battalion of 141st Texas Regiment in October of 1944. The 442<sup>nd</sup> endured non-stop combat and suffered heavy casualties in rescuing the other unit, raising questions if the unit was being used as “canon-fodder” and merely a way to improve views towards Japanese Americans. For more information see: Abbie Grubb. “Rescue of the Lost Battalion,” *Densho Encyclopedia*, accessed July 26, 2020, <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Rescue%20of%20the%20Lost%20Battalion>.

<sup>27</sup> Stafford Arima quoted in the commentary track for *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.



war. The character who comments the most on this is Sammy, who after the war does not feel like a war hero despite earning the Purple Heart. When Mike Masaoka refers to him as a “conquering hero” and “war hero,” Sammy recounts how his platoon has “800 casualties to save 200 men” and that “it was a bloodbath.”<sup>28</sup> Instead of celebrating the heroism of the 442<sup>nd</sup>, Sammy is haunted by the costs of the battle, reinforcing the disconnect between veterans’ and civilians’ experiences in war, especially among Japanese Americans. By showcasing the 442<sup>nd</sup> and their losses, *Allegiance* effectively depicts the brutal realities of warfare and its aftermath whereas past musicals seek to hide it in support of wartime romanticism.

The most notable and arguably controversial moment in *Allegiance*’s depiction of the Second World War is the song “Itetsuita,” which depicts the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, and the transition into the song “Victory Swing.” The first song “Itetsuita” depicts the bombing of Hiroshima, on a completely dark stage with the lighting lightly illuminating the ensemble as a radio announcement solemnly reports the bombing. This is interspersed with the ensemble singing in Japanese in a somewhat eerie manner (here in English translation):

*At 8:15 AM Tokyo time, the B-29  
bomber, Enola Gay...  
Itetsuita (it was frozen)*

*Described as incomprehensible  
devastation...  
Dozo miyou (here, look)*

*A single atomic bomb on the  
Japanese city of Hiroshima...  
Sugoku natsui (too blisteringly hot)*

*And we pray this promises a quick  
end to the war  
Kaze o miyou (look at the wind)  
Itetsuita (it was frozen)  
Itetsuita (it was frozen)<sup>29</sup>*

As the song continues, white follow spots travel from the ensembles’ feet upwards to illuminate their bodies and faces before disappearing, making the ensemble look ghostlike.

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<sup>28</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

<sup>29</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

Producer and co-librettist Lorenzo Thione described how during the piece “the people on stage are stand-ins. They’re not just the wives of the men fallen in battle, but also the relatives of the people wiped away by Hiroshima”<sup>30</sup> In the DVD’s commentary track, director Stafford Arima also emphasized the importance of making sure that audiences made the connection that some of those at Heart Mountain Camp had friends or relatives back in Japan who may have been physically impacted or killed in the Hiroshima bombing, making the moment eerie and touching.<sup>31</sup> At the end of the song, the whole ensemble stands in a line and is ghosted over by the spots, before dispersing as a projection of a smoky bombing is shown. In the end, the stage goes dark and a singular white flash illuminates the stage and a loud sound is heard designating the explosion. After a moment or so of silence, there is an abrupt transition to a red, white, and blue projection of the Capitol Building and the word “Victory!” as upbeat swing music starts to play, generating a sense of emotional whiplash. Forgetting that the atomic bomb decimated thousands of innocent lives, the imagery of an American giddy with victory is presented to audiences as three enthusiastic white USO pilots celebrate the 442<sup>nd</sup> and victory overseas.

The images and celebration of Americana and victory are juxtaposed with the Japanese Americans who, having just been released from the camps, received just \$25 and a bus ticket to return to civilian life. The desperation of the Japanese American community harshly contrasts the celebratory, smiling faces of the USO pilots as the disconnect between Japanese Americans and wider American society is staged. Towards the end of the song, the Japanese Americans join in the “Victory” chant but the light-hearted swing music dissipates as it turns from a celebratory chant to an almost riotous one. While the rest of America is celebrating, the Japanese American

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<sup>30</sup> Lorenzo Thione (*Allegiance* Producer, Film Director, and Co-Librettist), interviewed by author via Zoom, June 3, 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Stafford Arima, quoted in the commentary track for *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione, (Sing Out Louise Productions, 2018), DVD.

community is faced with confusion, frustration, and anger that comes with restarting their lives postwar.

These two numbers individually critique the decision to use the atomic bomb and postwar treatment of Japanese Americans; however, when they are paired together, hold much more resonance. The brisk transition is uncomfortable, as the audience just watched and mourned victims of an atomic bombing and mere seconds later are thrust into a triumphant, up-tempo song which feels in poor taste considering what had just ensued. In an interview when discussing the moment, Lorenzo Thione commented:

I always found the stark moment of juxtaposition of the bomb and the devastation to the celebration of Victory back at home here, to be something that should spark discomfort, outrage, and reflection upon the fact that that's actually what happened. While a million people were incinerated, we were celebrating the victory of a war.<sup>32</sup>

The transition from “Itetsuita” to “Victory Swing” is meant to be uncomfortable for audiences and provoke them to reconsider America's wartime and postwar conduct during the show’s main moment that “calls into question what the country did.”<sup>33</sup> As most of the show is about the Japanese American community and not America’s actions, it does not put the nation directly under a microscope for its actions. There is an acknowledgment that what is going on is wrong and should not be occurring, but the transition to and number “Victory Swing” is the exception to the rule. While *Allegiance* balances joy and sorrow, community, and injustice throughout the show, this is the one moment that tosses all of that aside to truly call into question the myth of the ‘Good War’ to audiences, making audiences realize what happened was not part of an American Golden Age and was truly ugly. *Allegiance* challenges the idea of World War II

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<sup>32</sup> Lorenzo Thione (*Allegiance* Producer, Film Director, and Co-Librettist), interviewed by author, via Zoom, June 3, 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Jay Kuo, quoted in *Allegiance to Broadway*.

as a ‘Good War’ in a way that privileges highlighting and humanizing the experiences of Japanese Americans over confronting “white” injustice, so as to not alienate “white” audiences who may be turned off to feeling guilty throughout the musical. Still, it also does not fail to make bold statements in certain moments to highlight that in the end, Japanese American incarceration is not something that can be treated lightly or brushed aside by history.

### ***Gaman: To Endure with Dignity and Fortitude***

While *Allegiance* is a musical that exposes the historical injustices of the Japanese American incarceration, it does not present Japanese Americans as passive victims of the experience. Instead, the musical humanizes the incarcerated Japanese Americans by focusing on their strength, perseverance, and community building to exert agency in the camps as they adjusted to incarcerated life. This was partially achieved through showcasing camp life through certain scenes and moments. Co-librettist and composer-lyricist Jay Kuo talked about the usage of joy and humor during the show in the documentary *Allegiance to Broadway*:

I know that this show has a lot of heart on its sleeve. We’re asking [the audience] to laugh within minutes of having them weep and that’s the story we’re charged to tell because that’s the story of these survivors, you know. They didn’t just shrink into a corner and disappear. They built lives for themselves, they got married, they fell in love, so life went on and there were joyous moments and sad moments and that’s what we portray.<sup>34</sup>

*Allegiance* tries to highlight the moments of strength and unity within the Japanese American community and the incorporation of elements of pre-camp life to help make their daily lives better. The most notable scene that showcases this is the musical number “Get in the Game,” during which Sammy Kimura tries to start a petition to the camp authorities for ways to improve life such as access to communal activities like gardening, swing dance, and baseball.

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<sup>34</sup> Jay Kuo, quoted in *Allegiance to Broadway*.

During the scene, community members express their discontent that the government “brought [them] here, Forgot about [them], Then left [them] to rot” and have not provided necessities like blankets and medicine.<sup>35</sup> Sammy encourages everyone to keep their chins up and sees his petition as a way to advocate for better treatment and recreate a semblance of normality and joy in their situation. He tells everyone: “It’s more than just the basics. We have to find a way to make life livable here, No, enjoyable, Oh, fun even.”<sup>36</sup>

While some of the older communal members want to bring ethnic activities to the camp like sumo and judo, the younger generation recommends more American activities like swing dancing and Frank Sinatra music, which would be smiled upon more by camp authorities. In the end, Sammy Kimura recommends they play baseball, which both generations can agree on, and what was more patriotic and less controversial than “America’s national pastime.” The title “Get in the Game” refers both to the physical game of baseball and to the figurative need for the community to stop being passive and come together to support themselves by confronting camp authorities with their needs. Steeped in imagery of teamwork, unity, and community, some of the lyrics are as follows:

<i>We’re stuck who knows how long</i>	<i>It’s no big, crazy claim</i>
<i>And sure it’s wrong</i>	<i>It’s time we overcame</i>
<i>Alone it’s really hard</i>	<i>And got back in the game!</i>
<i>But as a team we’re strong</i>	<i>Gotta get in the game!<sup>37</sup></i>

Through highlighting Japanese American agency, the musical credits the community in coping with the injustice forced upon them. As the lyrics suggest, the characters acknowledge the

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<sup>35</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

<sup>36</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

<sup>37</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

unjust and unfair nature of their situation, but instead of giving up they remain resolute to persevere through the situation together, which is one of the musical's major themes. Musically, the song is catchy, up-tempo, and has a pep in its step, paralleling Sammy's urging the community to find fun and joy in their lives. When everyone in the camp decides to work together, it turns into a rousing brassy number that unites traditional Japanese instruments with American jazz ones, highlighting the blend of cultures and generations. As opposed to letting the generational differences between the *issei* and *nisei* members of the community divide them, the community endeavors to find solace and strength through one another.

While "Get in the Game" is a fairly joyful and humorous song, its message of endurance works well into *Allegiance's* main theme, *gaman*, a Japanese term meaning "to endure with dignity and fortitude."<sup>38</sup> "Gaman" is both a song in the show and a theme expressed throughout the piece which was heavily inspired by George Takei, who learned the term from his mother and brought it to Kuo.

Plot-wise, "Gaman" occurs very early in the musical, after the Kimuras and other Japanese American families arrive at Heart Mountain and realize how stark their new reality is and are starting to lose hope. They are subjected to shameful medical examinations and come to terms with their new realities such as the shared barracks, lack of privacy, and constant military presence. In the scene, one of the older Japanese women, Mrs. Tankaka breaks down, begging to go home, and everyone is rightfully on edge, scared, and confused. After Ojii-Chan tells Sammy "gaman" when he is getting angry at the situation, Kei tries to use the term as a way to comfort the distressed people in their bunker, singing:

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<sup>38</sup> Jay Kuo quoted in "Episode 3: Art Isn't Easy" of the *Allegiance: Trek to Broadway* docuseries, directed by Greg Vander Veer (2015, Local Road Productions), DVD.

*It will all be alright  
There's a way through this night  
Stay strong  
On this long road  
We bury our pain  
There's a word we will say  
To help get through each day*

*We will bear any nightmare  
With a simple refrain  
Gaman, Gaman  
Sturdy and sure, keep faith and endure  
Gaman, Gaman  
Hold your head high and carry on, Gaman.<sup>39</sup>*

Kei gently coaxes the positive spirit out of the people in the bunker, starting with Sammy and her father. However, by the end of the song, everyone in the bunker is singing along. Musically, the song starts as soft and slow words of comfort with gentle instrumentation, but over the course of the song as other people in the bunker join in the instrumentation gets heavier and more rousing. It moves from just being a song of gentle reassurance into a steadfast self-assured chant that unites the community in purpose. Kei's supportive actions in this scene help unite the bunker in one of their lowest moments in the show, laying the foundation for the tight-knit community the bunker develops over the course of the show.

The spirit of *gaman* is most embodied in the character Ojii-Chan, the Kimura siblings' grandfather, played by George Takei. Given the concept of *gaman* in the show is because of Takei's experience and influence, it is fitting that is what his character represents. Ojii-Chan is a sweet-natured and free-spirited grandfather who even in his lowest moments handles everything with grace, strength, and resolve. He also encourages other characters such as Kei to embody this spirit within the scene with the song "Ishi Kara Ishi." In this number, Ojii-Chan encourages Kei to enjoy herself and go to the dance instead of worrying about the loyalty questionnaire and the interfamilial conflict. In the scene, Ojii-Chan turns the physical loyalty questionnaire, the source

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<sup>39</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

of Kei's stress, into a flower she can wear in her hair at the dance. Lorenzo Thione commented about the scene in the *Trek to Broadway* docuseries:

In the show, there's a scene where something that's really ugly, which is this questionnaire that gets given to all internees to figure out who is loyal and who is disloyal...gets turned by Ojii-Chan into something really beautiful, this little origami flower. And he gives it to Kei, Lea's character, for her to put in her hair and gets a smile out of her. So, the origami flower becomes the symbol for the resilience of building something beautiful out of the ugliness that was the situation in which the characters find themselves.<sup>40</sup>

As the musical's key art, Ojii-Chan's origami flower not only serves as an example of enduring hard and complicated times with dignity and fortitude but also becomes a key part of Kei's personal growth. The flower is a subtle form of protest against the questionnaire and its intentions, making it her way of critiquing the government's actions in a less extreme way than joining the 442<sup>nd</sup> like Sammy or becoming a resister like Frankie. She also encourages forms of protest like a letter-writing campaign to try to free Frankie and the other draft resisters. Later in the show, despite being pregnant and worried for her brother off at war and her lover stuck in prison, Kei does not falter and remains firm in her resolve to endure what she is going through and continue to serve the camp community. Over the course of the show, Kei, like her grandfather, learns to embody the spirit of *gaman* in her community, making her character a powerful role model and apt character to carry on Ojii-Chan's legacy after his passing.

### ***Resist and Fight: No-No Boys, Draft Resisters, and the 442<sup>nd</sup>***

While *Allegiance* highlights community building and unity in the camps, the musical also showcases the three major divisions that occurred within the camp to provide a fuller picture of the Japanese American incarceration story. Two songs that showcase these divisions among the

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<sup>40</sup> Lorenzo Thione, quoted in "Episode 3: Art Isn't Easy."



community are “Allegiance” and “Resist,” which speak to the divisions in opinions between the No-No Boys, Draft Resisters, and those who served in the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team during the war. All three groups functioned in different ways to protest the American government’s actions towards Japanese Americans during the Second World War.

The first faction was the No-Nos, a group of Japanese American citizens who answered “No” to questions 27 and 28 on the War Department and WRA loyalty questionnaire discussed earlier.<sup>41</sup> In *Allegiance*, Tatsuo Kimura, Kei and Sammy’s father, is representative of the No-No faction, as he remains firm in saying “an honorable man must take a stand for what he believes” and is thus taken to the more secure American concentration camp at Tule Lake.<sup>42</sup> Tatsuo is only treated better when Sammy is on the cover of *Life* magazine for being a war hero with the 442<sup>nd</sup>, but it is implied that he endured traumatic treatment before this.<sup>43</sup>

The second faction featured is composed of Japanese Americans who resisted the mandatory draft, arguing that they should not be required to serve like all other citizens when the government was not treating them as equals. While eight of the ten American concentration camps experienced some form of draft resistance, Heart Mountain had some of the largest numbers, making it an apt location to explore in *Allegiance*. While the show features numerous resisters, the character Frankie Suzuki, who eventually marries Kei, is the clearest representative. Frankie Suzuki is also loosely inspired by Japanese American civil rights activist Frank Seishi Emi who organized the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee, which advocated for the incarcerated *nisei* to resist the draft unless they and their families' rights and freedoms were

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<sup>41</sup> Brian Niiya, “No-no boys.”

<sup>42</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

<sup>43</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

restored.<sup>44</sup> The number “Resist” showcases the creation of the draft resistance movement, as Frankie gives a rousing call to action to the other people in his community that feels evocative of *Les Misérables*’ Enjolras:

*FRANKIE: They threw us in here, made us all disappear  
Without charge, or cause, or reason  
Now we're ordered to fight, have our blood spilled  
Despite, the way that they've treated us  
So this is the plight, resist, take a stand  
They can hang us all for treason*

*FRANKIE & MALE ENSEMBLE: Let our families go home, and we're ready to serve  
Be drafted like the rest*

*FRANKIE: We've our righteous cause, there are rights and laws  
Let's put 'em to the test.*<sup>45</sup>

Frankie and the draft resistance movement highlight the irony of asking Japanese Americans who were forcibly incarcerated in their own country to lay down their lives for a country that was treating them as enemy aliens. While they advocated for the unconstitutional nature of forcing them to serve, many resisters, including members of the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee historically as well as their counterparts in *Allegiance*, were arrested for their actions. During and after the war, draft resisters and No-No’s were stigmatized for their wartime actions. They were often seen as cowards or traitors both inside and outside the Japanese American community, an opinion that has only changed recently to see their actions in a more positive light.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Eric Muller, “Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee,” *Densho Encyclopedia*, accessed August 2, 2020, <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Heart%20Mountain%20Fair%20Play%20Committee>; Eric Muller, “Draft Resistance,” *Densho Encyclopedia*, accessed August 2, 2020, <https://encyclopedia.densho.org/Draft%20resistance>.

<sup>45</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

<sup>46</sup> Eric Muller, “Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee.”; Eric Muller, “Draft Resistance.”; Brian Niiya “No-no boys.”

The third faction is those who fought for the 442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team, a segregated Japanese American Army unit, largely composed of *nisei* who “were fighting to win two wars: the war against the Germans in Europe and the war against racial prejudice in America.”<sup>47</sup> Sammy, who is part of the *nisei* generation and has a strong sense of patriotism linked to being American, is outraged by the incarceration and sees enlisting as a way to prove his loyalty and his community’s. In his act one number, “What Makes a Man,” Sammy sings the following about his conviction to serve, loyalty to his country, and how he believes this is the answer to help free his family:

*It’s time we took action  
And found a way out of this place  
I’ll set an example  
Help others to see beyond race*

*And though my face resembles  
Our enemies in war  
I am still American  
Nothing less and nothing more!*<sup>48</sup>

Over the course of the musical, *Allegiance* stages the conflict between these groups, as opposed to just presenting them in the musical numbers “Resist” and “Allegiance.” During “Resist,” Sammy, who is now a decorated war hero in the 442<sup>nd</sup>, explains to the press why he is fighting for his country:

SAMMY: I am fighting for the honor of all Japanese Americans. Especially my grandfather and father, who spent their lives proving their loyalty to the United States. I look forward to the day that I can see them, free.<sup>49</sup>

Similar to his sentiment in “What Makes a Man,” Sammy uses his platform as a celebrated war hero to protest the Japanese American incarceration. Sammy showcases how he is

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<sup>47</sup> “442<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team,” *Go for Broke National Education Center*, accessed August 2, 2020, [http://www.goforbroke.org/learn/history/military\\_units/442nd.php](http://www.goforbroke.org/learn/history/military_units/442nd.php).

<sup>48</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

<sup>49</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

just like everyone else serving in the military and making the ultimate sacrifice for their country and thus, Japanese Americans deserve to be free like everyone else in the country. As one of the motivations for incarceration was fear of disloyalty and espionage among Japanese Americans, Sammy and the 442<sup>nd</sup> combatted this notion by showing their loyalty in the most resonant and clear way possible, military service.

“Resist” highlights the differences in ideology between Sammy and Frankie in terms of the best way to achieve freedom for incarcerated Japanese Americans. Both Sammy and Frankie see themselves in the right and the other in the wrong: Sammy for accommodating the American government and Frankie for being a coward and traitor. In the song, they both sing the following lyrics, highlighting their shared goal, but different ideologies and methods for doing so:

*American values are what lie at stake  
We stand for what is right  
Life and liberty, This will set us free  
And we're ready to fight*<sup>50</sup>

Each man’s clear vision of what America and its values entail is what leads to their strong positioning, which is highlighted lyrically in the resisters’ chant “Resist,” and the 442<sup>nd</sup>’s response “And Fight.”<sup>51</sup> As the two groups on opposite sides of the stage sing the complete chant back and forth, the deep-seated divisions are highlighted spatially and musically.<sup>52</sup> On stage, a small group of uniformed and wounded Japanese American veterans with Frankie as its head are on stage right while a large group of incarcerated Japanese Americans forms a small mob on stage left. There is physical space between these two ideologies on stage as the groups raise their

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<sup>50</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

<sup>51</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

<sup>52</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

voices in an impassioned, protest-like chant against one another. While showing these divisions on a major scale between groups, it is also personal as Sammy condemns Frankie by name and calls for his arrest to the press, leading to further divisions, arrests, and hardship at the camp.<sup>53</sup> This song reinforces the theme that war can break up families and communities by staging this in both universal and personal contexts.

Similarly, the song “Allegiance” highlights the conflict between Tatsuo Kimura, a No-No, and his son Sammy, who joins the 442<sup>nd</sup>, when the family receives the loyalty questionnaire. In the preceding scene, when everyone discusses the questionnaire each faction’s representative responds to Question 27 that pertains to military service:

FRANKIE: So we can’t live free in this country but we can die for it?

SAMMY: Isn’t freedom worth dying for?

TATSUO: You would put on the same uniform as soldiers who point guns at us?

SAMMY: We’re all Americans.<sup>54</sup>

In these short exchanges, each character's position is clear in terms of the questionnaire and military service and aligns well with the faction they represent. Tatsuo and Frankie are critical of the notion of serving a country that is incarcerating them, whereas Sammy sees service as the means to achieve freedom by earning back America's trust. This conflict is further highlighted in the song “Allegiance” where Tatsuo and Sammy fight about Sammy wanting to serve and the discussion where their allegiances lie: Tatsuo’s with his family and Sammy’s with his country. In the song, this tension is also evidenced in word choice as Tatsuo refers to the US Army as “their Army” which Sammy corrects to be “our Army.”<sup>55</sup> By presenting factional

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<sup>53</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

<sup>54</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

<sup>55</sup> *Allegiance*, directed by Lorenzo Thione.

differences onstage *Allegiance* highlights the debates over the best way to protest the incarceration and presents the Japanese American community as an active people who were not complicit in their incarceration and did not share a single unified experience.

### ***Nuancing Old War Myths and Telling New War Stories***

As the custodians of World War II memory have largely passed on and historians have contested old myths, the 21<sup>st</sup>-century climate has allowed for pieces like *Allegiance* to be permissible, and encouraged, in musical theatre and entertainment at large. When wartime memory is fresh, the personal memory of veterans and their families, government officials, and civilians are able to clash with the work of historians and artists who may obscure their sacrifices and the morality of historical actions. With time, however, people who felt unable to speak out about their contrasting experiences have more space to tell their narratives and what was once personal war memory becomes something closer to collective memory.

This is the same reason that musical theatre has not had the chance to fully grapple with American injustice in recent conflicts associated with the War on Terror. With historical tragedies like 9/11 and the costly wars in Afghanistan and Iraq still fresh in the national mind, it is hard for artists to contend with the complicated legacy of such events in a nuanced way. However, as patterns of history recur and situations from our past persist into the future, musical theatre acts as a proxy to contest with themes surrounding current events. For example, while *Bandstand* is about the Second World War, its depiction of the struggles of American veterans dealing with traumatic brain injuries and PTSD and reintegrating into society postwar resonates today. Other shows like *Allegiance* provide cautionary tales about the impacts of nuclear warfare and educate audiences on the commonly untold story about American concentration camps, even as historical parallels reemerge in ICE detention centers on the US-Mexico border. By better

processing the wartime legacies of our more distant past through art, audiences can better contextualize and understand the present and work to combat these injustices as they occur.

*Allegiance* marks a paradigm shift in musical theatre representations of war because it does what musicals like *South Pacific* and *Miss Saigon* could not. *South Pacific* came out immediately postwar on the heels of a triumphant America in the nation's Golden Age and aimed to commemorate the wartime experiences of the Greatest Generation. It generated America-serving and patriotic nostalgia for a successful war while also pushing its anti-racist agenda, which was ideal for the postwar climate and overemphasis of American loyalty that would mark the early Cold War Years. And in a time of ticker-tape parades, economic success, and a higher standard of living, who wanted to remember or relive combat death on stage? *Allegiance* had the distance from this to call into question a picturesque version of war and highlight the combat death and American injustice that might have earned Rodgers and Hammerstein an examination by the House Un-American Activities Committee and negative reviews from critics, veterans, and civilians.

Like *Allegiance*, *Miss Saigon* came out long after its respective war ended, but it still endeavored to romanticize the war in a way that did not contradict the war's mythology. Boublil and Schönberg's megamusical made the Vietnam War a sexualized spectacle that robbed the Vietnamese people of their agency and gave America the pass on her wartime failures. By making the Vietnam War an America-centric phenomenon, *Miss Saigon* put 'Vietnam Syndrome' on stage and paralleled the shift in how America dealt with recovering domestically and internationally from the military misadventure. Instead, *Allegiance* was created by an Asian American who emphasized the agency of the Japanese American wartime community instead of negating it to create a more authentic piece that isn't laced with Orientalist thought and a white

savior narrative. While *Allegiance*, unlike *Miss Saigon*, does not constantly point the finger at “white” America to make audiences guilty for the nation’s historical past, the musical still calls into question America’s wartime injustices to nuance war mythology and encourages audiences to grapple with the complexities of the narrative.

Unlike the musicals of the earlier periods, *Allegiance*, like other 21<sup>st</sup> century shows that reexamine World War II, contests the celebratory view of former American wars now that there has been time for historical retrospective. This, combined with an increasing interest in people’s history and a reexamination of if America truly practices what it preaches has provided a rich landscape for critical scholarship. Musical theatre has taken audiences away from the battlefields and back to the home front to examine civilian experiences during and after the war to tell lesser-known and less glamorous war stories. *Allegiance* endeavors to provide a nuanced look at the Japanese American incarceration experience by highlighting the perseverance and resolve of the community while also detailing the suffering, divisions, and injustices they faced. While it does not attempt to shame audiences, it does call into question America’s own unjust actions during World War II to highlight that which directly contradicts the myth of the ‘Good War.’ *Allegiance* effectively tells a little-told story about this chapter in American history on the Broadway stage, helping bring more public recognition to the existence and injustice of the Japanese American incarceration experience. In the first two decades of the century, Broadway has already examined World War II, Vietnam, and the War on Terror, and time will tell how contemporary musical theatre will continue to engage with war, especially in an age of perpetual ones.



## **Conclusion – Culture Changes the Musical, the Musical Changes Culture**

Musical theatre is one of the truest American artforms, with the nation's and the artform's histories inextricably linked. The theatre industry's trajectory and output have often mirrored and responded to sociopolitical and cultural trends of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The impact of war has been no different. America has been engaged in war for much of its recent history, despite the fact Congress has not formally declared war since the Second World War. In response, theatre has consistently engaged with war and its associated conflicts. Examining war-related theatre is also not just important from a historical standpoint. Cast members, audiences, and creative teams find themselves transformed by being a part of and witnessing this experience. These historical pieces encourage the theatre industry and its aficionados to look back in their family history, ask questions about their family members' wartime experiences, and better understand the lives of both living and deceased loved ones affected by war. Whether or not those who have experienced war discuss it, these experiences are part of one's familial history or day-to-day reality, so the act of performing shows steeped in war and its consequences can be both cathartic and educational for performers as well as their audiences. In the documentary *Allegiance to Broadway*, Greg Watanabe, who plays Mike Masaoka, discussed the personal importance of performing in the show:

My dad's family was interned in Heart Mountain, I had an uncle who was in the 442 and ... I never knew any of that when I was growing up. I never had a conversation with my dad about the war or about the camps or anything ... I remember asking my dad, "I'm doing research for this play, what happened?" and he said, "You know the people who could answer that question are all dead now" and that made me pretty sad because it was like I missed out on my chance to ask those questions. Knowing that I have a personal

family connection to Heart Mountain and to that incarceration experience makes me feel responsible. It's my obligation as well as a privilege to be able to tell that story.<sup>1</sup>

War memory in theatre is also never static. Unlike film, music, or TV shows that are often preserved in their original form, live theatre changes each time it is staged with new directors and choreographers. Even today, the dominant cultural narratives and myths surrounding war can be renegotiated and reexamined in a piece to make efforts to meaningfully grapple with the nature of war in American popular memory. For example, the 2008 Broadway revival of *South Pacific* presented at the Lincoln Center in New York and starring Kelli O'Hara and Paulo Szot and directed by Bartlett Sher, was staged in the spirit of the original production with one significant change: the tone of the "Honeybun (Reprise)."<sup>2</sup> In one of the musical's final scenes, almost all the US soldiers and nurses depart the island to participate in Operation Alligator, an offensive in which many of them will likely die. In the original production (1949) and the West End transfer (1951) directed by Joshua Logan, the troops are sent off to war triumphantly with cheering nurses, warm embraces, and rousing fanfare.<sup>3</sup> In Sher's revival, produced after Vietnam and the Middle Eastern conflicts, the song is sung on a dimly lit stage as the soldiers and nurses sing the peppy tune as a somber, disheartened military march.<sup>4</sup> This simple staging change in the revival sends a much more harrowing message, tempering nostalgia

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Watanabe quoted in *Allegiance to Broadway: The Dream. The Story. The Journey of a Musical*, directed by Greg Vander Veer (Sing Out Louise Productions, 2018), DVD.

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph case study on *South Pacific* is directly drawn from my undergraduate thesis. For further reading see: Leana Sottile, "Desegregation Through Entertainment: Rodgers and Hammerstein's *South Pacific* as an Instrument of Military Policy," *Voces Novae*, Vol. 12, Article 6, <https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/vocesnovae/vol12/iss1/6>.

<sup>3</sup> "Honeybun (Reprise)", Act II, *South Pacific* at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane, 1952, accessed April 7, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRou\\_Hlvmzs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRou_Hlvmzs).

<sup>4</sup> "Honeybun (Reprise)", Act II, "South Pacific," *Live at Lincoln Center*, 2008, accessed April 7, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c4jj9EiJYYk>.

with war's gravity and reflecting a heightened consciousness about war and society's responsibility.

This shift from triumph and celebration to hesitancy and solemnity in this one number reflects how American war memory in musical theatre remains a subject of discourse, and will continue to be so as Americans are shaped by their foreign wars. Shifts like this are reflective of a larger trend in musical theatre as numerous musicals attempt to process war, terrorism, genocide, and collective trauma in a more meaningful way. Examples of such musicals include *Come From Away* (Irene Sankoff, David Kein, 2017), which is based on the true story of 38 planes being rerouted to the town of Gander in Newfoundland due to the September 11th attacks, and *Cambodian Rock Band* (Lauren Yee, Dengue Fever, 2018) which is about the experience of a Khmer Rouge survivor returning to Cambodia when his daughter prosecutes a Khmer Rouge era war criminal. As questions of war and society emerge more and more onstage, the intersection of musical theatre and war studies becomes an increasingly apt area for future scholarship to fill out the historiography of musicals related to war and its associated conflicts and consequences.

Additionally, as musical theatre has progressed in years, Asian and Pacific Islander representation onstage has moved away from heavy stereotyping and towards authenticity. While Broadway is by no means perfect, the Asian 'Other' is much less distinct now that Asian creatives like Jay Kuo have gotten a spot at the table to create positive Asian representations for wide-reaching audiences. However, in the advent of the War on Terror, the Asian 'Other' may shift into the Middle Eastern one on Broadway, akin to how it has in modern American society. With shows like *Come From Away* already tackling questions of Islamophobia onstage, there is hope that representation will not be as egregious as early musical theatre was towards Asian and

Pacific Islander peoples, but whether this is the exception or the rule in American musical theatre remains to be seen.

It is not coincidental that musical theatre's mythical Golden Age in the 1940s and 1950s coincides with America's. Coming out of the Second World War, theatre and the nation at large commemorated the can-do attitude of an American people who were unstoppable in the face of global fascism and came out the international system's leader. There was no venue for Second World War veterans to process their negative wartime experiences when ticker-tape parades and impassioned civilians tried to usher back in normality; Similarly, there was no venue for theatre to contend with war's horrors when nostalgia-filled romantic depictions of wartime service that championed military spirit like *South Pacific* is what sold tickets. Instead of remembering the war Pacific Theatre as it was, *South Pacific* sanitizes the experience to silence the toll of death in a time of war and champion military morale, endless recreation, and camaraderie. Rodgers and Hammerstein's World War II is not a devastating conflict; It is a tropical paradise where Asian and Pacific Islander peoples are backgrounded in a narrative that uses them as props to drive home the exotic mystique of military adventurism in the Pacific. Golden Age legacies and Good War mythology that were omnipresent in popular memory were reinforced on the 1940s and 1950s Broadway stage and remained a staple until involvement in Vietnam would change everything.

It is similarly not coincidental that some of the most serious and disillusioned pieces surrounding America's wartime past and would emerge in the 1960s through the 1990s as a response to the Vietnam War during and after the conflict. The nation's failure to contain communism in Vietnam after pouring irreplaceable time, resources, and American lives into the region ushered in a crisis of American confidence that would shake the nation until the Persian

Gulf War would restore it. This period of musical theatre served as a middle ground where romanticization and exoticization of war history and memory were still prevalent, but strides were made in applying war and society methodology onstage by examining elements like civilian and veteran postwar impact and displacement. Boublil and Schönberg's *Miss Saigon* served as a venue to come to terms with America's guilt over intervening in Vietnam yet also reimagines the war as primarily an American tragedy. The musical discounts any American or individual responsibility in the conflict and blames the nature of war for everyone's suffering, thereby soothing the audience's discomfort with the conflict and robbing the Vietnamese characters of their agency within their own nation's history. Instead of highlighting the perseverance of the Vietnamese people, they rely upon and beg the Americans to save them from destitution and communists, displaying the Orientalist notions that the show champions. This period in musical theatre attempted to tackle the meaning of the Vietnam Era by engaging with war through having meaningful conversations. That being said, these discussions were still cushioned within traditional stereotypes and show business magic that downplayed authenticity in war-based musical theatre and would only be changed with the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has provided musical theatre that reexamines the myths surrounding American war-making and contends with the reality of perpetual war. As the nation has been criticized for championing American exceptionalism when its values directly contradict its domestic climate and foreign interventions, there has also been ample time to reflect upon and reexamine the past. As the custodians of memory from the Second World War-era pass on and minority communities assert themselves in history and art, there has been room to reexamine war mythology by telling stories that do not fit into the traditional cultural narrative. Jay Kuo's *Allegiance* reminds audiences that America was not the perfect, heroic nation in World War II as

memory and history previously led them to believe. Instead, it educates audiences on the Japanese American incarceration experience through showcasing these injustices and giving agency back to the victims of the nation's xenophobic wartime national security policy. Unlike earlier musicals that prescribe to Orientalist depictions of Asian peoples, *Allegiance* seeks to be an authentic depiction of the wartime Japanese American community created by Asian-Americans to showcase them as a people who persevered through adversity yet also had varied experiences in their incarceration. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, contemporary musical theatre has worked to challenge war romanticism and mythology onstage and urges audiences to do the same in their own lives, which is a long-overdue step in war-centered media.

Musical theater has historically been a venue for Americans to come to terms with our historical past and the present on both a national and a personal level as it stages and restages war mythology on the Broadway Stage popular culture. Some pieces romanticize former conflicts and conflate American notions of heroism and war guilt in the international system. Other works are transformative pieces of contemporary theatre that have the potential to move audiences to think about war and its costs because of the performances they've witnessed. As the nation has won, lost, and abandoned foreign conflicts, the connotation, remembrance, and commemoration of war in American memory has shifted. Following the Second World War was something to be celebrated. War's depiction during and after the Vietnam War became more traumatic and burdened by guilt over a conflict that generated a crisis in American confidence. Today, war and militarization have attained a new normalization as the nation has been in a state of perceived perpetual conflict due to the War on Terror. In response, creators sought to make meaning and content of these circumstances through art. Over time, musical theatre has shifted how it depicts war by making strides in creating more honest and objective portrayals of

wartime, postwar experiences, and the associated trauma and displacement because of war. In the end, musical theatre is not just a piece of entertainment, it is a composite of war memory, mythology, and history in American popular culture. At every turn, American culture has changed musical theatre, and it has followed in suit to contest and confirm these shifts to serve not only as a piece of entertainment, but also as a composite of war memory, mythology, and history in American popular culture.

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