WORDS on PLAYS

INSIGHT INTO THE PLAY, THE PLAYWRIGHT, AND THE PRODUCTION

After the War

BY PHILIP KAN GOTANDA
DIRECTED BY CAREY PERLOFF
AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER
MARCH 22–APRIL 22, 2007

WORDS ON PLAY PREPARED BY
ELIZABETH BRODERSEN
PUBLICATIONS EDITOR
MICHAEL PALLER
RESIDENT DRAMATURG
MARGOT MELCON
PUBLICATIONS & LITERARY ASSISTANT

A.C.T. is supported in part by grants from the Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund and the National Endowment for the Arts, which believes that a great nation deserves great art.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Characters, Cast, and Synopsis of *After the War*

8. From the Playwright

12. A Brief Biography of Philip Kan Gotanda

13. *After the War*: First Rehearsals

23. “The Fillmore Was Tough But Happenin’”  
   *by Elizabeth Brodersen*

31. Black Americans in the 1940s  
   *by Margot Melcon*

35. Japanese-American Internment during World War II: A Timeline

40. *Nisei* Soldiers: Two Stories  
   *by Martin Schwartz*

45. Jazz in America  
   *by Laley Lippard*

51. Miscellaneous Tidbits of Information

57. Questions to Consider

58. For Further Information . . .
CHARACTERS, CAST, AND SYNOPSIS OF

AFTER THE WAR

After the War was originally commissioned by American Conservatory Theater. The world premiere production opened at A.C.T. in San Francisco, California, March 28, 2007.

CHARACTERS AND CAST

CHESTER/CHET MONKAWA

EARL T. WORTHING
African American. Mid 40s. Came from the South during the war to work on the docks. Lives with his 11-year-old daughter, Berniece, and his newly arrived sister-in-law, Leona Hitchings. Steven Anthony Jones

LILLIAN OKAMURA
Nisei. Late 20s to early 30s. Was engaged to Chet’s younger brother, Tadashi. Daughter of San Joaquin Valley truck farmers. Works at the boarding house. Sala Iwamatsu

MARY-LOUISE TUCKER
Caucasian, late 20s to early 30s. She is world weary. Originally from Oklahoma. She lives in the last room down the hall with her brother. Works at taxi-dance hall. Carrie Paff

MR. OJI

LEONA HITCHINGS
African-American woman in her early 40s. Proud, self-educated, with an air of importance. Older sister of Earl Worthing's young wife. Recently arrived from the South to help take care of Earl and her sister's child. Harriett D. Foy

OLGA MIKHOELS
Early to mid 20s, Russian Jew from Novosibirsk. Came to San Francisco by way of Yokohama, Japan. Ambitious, survivor. Works and boards at the boarding house. Delia MacDougall

BENJI TUCKER
Caucasian. Brother of Mary-Louise. Mary-Louise takes care of him. Ted Welch

MR. GOTO

Philip Kan Gotanda’s character descriptions are excerpted from, and the following synopsis is based on, the draft rehearsal script for After the War, as of March 7, 2007. As this is the first production of a new work in progress, significant changes may be made to the script before the opening night performance.
THE SETTING
Japanese Town, San Francisco, around 1948

SYNOPSIS

ACT 1: The Monkawa boarding house, mid afternoon. Lillian is putting flowers on the family obutsudan (Buddhist shrine) when Chester, Earl, and Benji enter carrying a television, which Chet has won in a department store raffle after an Italian neighbor bought a ticket for him. They laugh at the fact that the store’s staff were very unhappy when a Japanese and a “big, shiny Negro” showed up to claim the prize. Olga enters and asks what the television is, as she has never seen one before. Chet sends Benji away, and Earl, after accepting a few dollars for his help, leaves, too. Chet tries to explain to Olga what the television does in a broken combination of English, Japanese, and Russian. Chet and Lillian discuss the business of the boarding house, including the fact that Earl is behind on the rent and that his sister-in-law has recently come to stay with him. Olga reminds them that she has a “guest” coming that evening and therefore cannot help them with the cleaning.

Mary-Louise’s room, later that day. Mary Louise looks through a bag of groceries Earl brought her. She asks where he got the money for the groceries, since he’s out of work, and mocks him about Leona, who watches his every move. He tells Mary-Louise about going to a jazz club with Chet and his surprise that Chet knew the musicians. Mary-Louise wonders what will come of her relationship with Earl. He promises to try to make it work, and they embrace.

Downstairs. Lillian is at the shrine again when Chet walks by and sees her with a photograph of his brother, Tad, to whom Lillian was engaged before he was killed in the war.

The kitchen, later that day. Chet finds Leona while he is looking for Earl. She tells him that she will not pay extra to live in the boarding house while she is staying with Earl and Berniece; she has found out that Chet does not charge Japanese families when they have visitors and insists that he treat them the same, even though they are black.

The parlor. Lillian readies the key for Mr. Goto, who is Olga’s guest. When he comes in, he warns Lillian against associating with Chet, who is a pariah in the Japanese community. Lillian stands up for herself and Mr. Goto leaves, just as Mr. Oji arrives. She invites Mr. Oji to tea, and he offers her some manju. Mr. Oji complains to Lillian that he is unlikely to find a bride, as he thinks of himself as homely. Lillian tries to reassure him, but he refuses to listen. Olga enters with a request from Mr. Goto and is introduced to Mr. Oji. They chat a bit in broken Russian, and she leaves to attend to her guest.
Outside the boarding house, backporch, the next morning. Earl, Chet, and Lillian are trying to set up the television antenna. Chet and Lillian tease Earl about his attempt to eat sashimi (raw fish). Lillian goes inside, and Chet and Earl discuss the lack of work now that the shipyards have closed. With Olga and Benji’s help, they all manage to get a clear picture on the television.

Chet and Earl put on a record and talk about music and Chet’s time in the internment camps during the war. Earl sympathizes with Chet, comparing the internment of Japanese Americans with the history of African Americans and the racism they face.

The yard behind the boarding house, later that day. Lillian and Chet tend to crates of plants. Lillian talks about boxing, which pleasantly surprises Chet, and he talks about playing music. Lillian confesses that Chet’s brother took her to see Chet play once. Chet reminisces about playing in Chicago after leaving the camp.

The back porch. Benji gives Mary-Louise a foot massage after she comes home from work. He tells her about running all over the neighborhood and seeing people taking pictures of the buildings. They play a game, looking for shapes in Mary-Louise’s exhaled smoke, and she talks dreamily about movie stars. Chet comes in, gives Benji a nickel, and sends him away. He and Mary-Louise talk about their past relationship. She teases him about having feelings for Lillian. He warns Mary-Louise not to tell Lillian about their past and leaves.

The kitchen, later that day. Leona welcomes Earl with a plate of food. He tells her that he might leave town to look for work, and she tells him that she talked to Chet about staying with Earl at no extra charge. They talk about what is happening to African Americans now that the Japanese are moving back to the neighborhood. Earl tries to convince Leona that the Japanese have as much right to be there as they do, if not more. Leona holds on to her belief that the hardships faced by African Americans are worse than those faced by the Japanese. When Earl suggests that Leona go back home, she reminds him that he has a daughter to take care of, no wife, and no job.

The parlor, later. Mr. Oji and Olga have tea and a language lesson. Olga recounts her travels from Russia to Japan and tells Oji that she was brought to San Francisco by a friend of her uncle. She asks why Oji is not married and tells him that, despite his low opinion of himself, he is a “good catch.”

The front stoop, early evening. Lillian has just returned from running errands. While she was out she ran into her parents, but they refused to speak to her. Chet offers to let her move into the boarding house. She accepts.

The next day, early morning. Olga seeks out Mary-Louise. She has found one of Mary-Louise’s shoes in front of her door, a harmless gift from Benji, but one she does not appre-
ciate. Olga asks Mary-Louise about getting a job at the dance hall where she works. Testing Olga, Mary-Louise challenges her to dance. Olga forces Mary-Louise to dance with her and eventually wins the battle of wills.

Later that morning. Chet meets Mr. Goto as he comes to deliver a phonograph player for Olga. Goto asks Chet about the memorial service for Tad, and tells Chet to let go of the bitterness he feels about the internment camps. They argue about Chet’s refusal to sign the loyalty oath and fight on the American side during the war, while other Japanese American men fought and died. Goto accuses Chet of being an ungrateful No-No Boy and tells him that Tad’s death made up for Chet’s cowardice and shame. Lillian meets Mr. Goto on his way out and reminds Chet that he should show Goto respect, because he is very powerful. She asks Chet why Mary-Louise only pays half rent, and reminds him that Earl is still behind in his payments. Chet explains to Lillian why he refused to sign the loyalty oath.

Mary-Louise’s room, the same day. Earl invites Mary-Louise to come downstairs to a party Chet is throwing to show off the new television. She asks Earl why he is with her. She wonders when life will get easier for them, as it was supposed to do once the war was over. When he says things don’t change for folks like them, she becomes angry that he has lumped them both in the same category. She reminds him that all they have is what happens in her bed, and that there are other men who want her.

The parlor, that evening. Olga and Lillian get ready for the television party and talk about the friendship developing between Olga and Mr. Oji. Olga asks Lillian about Tad; she replies that he was nothing like Chet, and that Chet always had a mind of his own. Olga asks Lillian if she loves Chet, but before she can answer, Olga leaves to prepare for Mr. Goto. People arrive for the party, introducing themselves and making small talk. Olga returns with Mr. Goto, who is very drunk, singing and lecturing to the rest of them about business. The television show begins, and, much to Earl’s delight, the program features Perry Como. Each person, acutely aware of his or her own secrets, comes together with another, and they dance.

INTERMISSION

ACT II: The boarding house, later that night. Chet comes down to clean up after the party. Earl, passing through, asks Chet where he learned to dance so well, and pointedly asks whether Chet thinks Mary-Louise is pretty. Chet gets himself a drink and Lillian comes in. He shares a drink with her and they talk about why he stopped playing music and how nice it was to have a good time again at the party.
The kitchen, early the next morning. Chet finds Mary-Louise and apologizes to her for the way their relationship ended in Chicago. Mary-Louise quickly leaves and Chet is left alone with Benji, who naively tells Chet about his sister’s relationship with Earl.

The back porch, later that day. Chet finds Earl and confronts him about his plans to stay at the boarding house. Earl defensively insists that he will find work soon. Chet tells Earl that he knows about the relationship with Mary-Louise, and that he resents Earl for supporting Mary-Louise instead of paying his rent, and for making Chet help hide the relationship from Leona.

The office. Lillian is attending to the shrine when Mr. Goto comes in. She asks him to give Chet a break, that he’s still upset by the attack on Pearl Harbor and his experience in the camps. He promises to think about Chet and leaves.

Leona pays Lillian the rent for the coming month. Lillian asks about the rent for the previous two months, which Leona didn’t know was still due. Leona says they will have to talk about it, and that they don’t need men to manage their business. She insists that she and Earl should not be kicked out of the boarding house, because African Americans ran the place while the Japanese were in the camps. Lillian insists that if she’s being rigid, it is not because of race, but because she and Chet can’t afford to let anyone slide on the rent. Leona tells Lillian about the African-American history of suffering, and that the Japanese suffering in the camps can not compare. They agree to try to find a woman-to-woman understanding and common ground.

The backyard, early evening of the same day. Mr. Oji and Olga dance. He offers her Russian pastries he bought for her and asks if their relationship is “special.” Olga insists that she can not afford “special,” but that if she does want something special someday, she will come to his room.

The alley behind the boarding house. Earl confronts Mary-Louise, accusing Benji of telling Chet about their relationship. He worries that word will get back to Leona. He calls Benji slow-witted and says he is a sign that God is punishing Mary-Louise. Their argument gets physical as she tries to get him to dance with her. Earl, worried about being seen with a white woman, pulls away from her. She tells him to go back to Leona, and leaves.

The parlor, the next evening. Returning from the five-year memorial service for Tad, Chet and Lillian talk about the fact that people refused to speak to him there. Chet is concerned that Lillian will be ostracized by the community because of her association with him. When Chet tells Lillian that he feels responsible for Tad enlisting and getting killed, Lillian confesses that she became pregnant while they were in the camps, and that Tad enlisted to run away from his responsibility for her and the baby. Lillian talks about the shame she feels and asks why Chet became a No-No Boy. He tells her that he believed in
America, that America was his country, and that being asked to sign the oath to prove his
loyalty to a government that had imprisoned him and his family was a betrayal by the
country he loved. Chet says that if he hadn’t been forced to prove himself, he would have
been happy to fight and die in the war. He also tells Lillian that, if he had been in Tad’s
place, he would not have abandoned her. They walk into Chet’s bedroom together.

*The parlor, the following morning.* Chet comes in with his duffel bag from the camps. He
pulls out his trumpet and a record on which he performed.

*The front hallway.* Mr. Oji is bringing Olga flowers when the door opens and Mr. Goto
and Olga come downstairs from his room. Olga confesses to Oji that she is in San
Francisco because she was sold to Goto to pay off a debt to the man who helped her leave
Russia. She refuses Oji’s offer to pay off the debt for her, but then invites him into her
room.

*The front stoop.* Earl confronts Benji and asks him whether he told Chet about Earl and
Mary-Louise. Benji denies it, and tells Earl that it could have been Mary-Louise who told
Chet, since they used to be together in Chicago.

*The parlor.* Lillian and Earl encounter each other, both looking for Chet. Earl asks
Lillian whether Chet knew Mary-Louise in Chicago.

*The kitchen, later that afternoon.* Leona is hiding the money she earned at her job when
Earl comes in. She tells him that she received a letter from her mother with news of their
families, but there is no news of his wife. Leona leaves to go to the store.

*Mary-Louise’s room.* Mary-Louise is throwing up. Soon after, Benji pulls Lillian into the
room to help her. Lillian sends Benji to get the doctor. When he is gone, Mary-Louise
confesses that she is pregnant and drank poison trying to get rid of the baby. Lillian asks
if Chet is the father; Mary-Louise admits that she did once have a relationship with Chet,
but the baby is Earl’s; he does not know about it. She says that what she really wants is to
keep the baby and make a life with Earl.

*The office.* Lillian plays Chet’s record. Leona brings her another installment of back rent.
Leona asks Lillian whether Earl knows Mary-Louise, which Lillian confirms. Understanding, Leona leaves.

*Backyard.* Olga is leaving for the dance hall, where she now works, when Mr. Goto
arrives. Enraged, he forbids her to go to work and hits her; she responds by telling him that
he is wasting his time building up Japanese Town, that she has heard rumors from one of
her customers about the neighborhood’s future.

*The alley behind the boardinghouse.* Earl finds Mary-Louise. He gives her a stack of money,
which he has taken from Leona’s jar. She asks him when they will go away together—to
Hollywood—and he tells her, “Tomorrow morning.” He leaves to buy three bus tickets.
The kitchen. Benji asks Leona to give him some pie. When Leona turns to put change in her jar, she discovers that the money is gone. As she pushes Benji out the door, he tells her that Mary-Louise is pregnant. Leona confronts Earl on his way to the bus station. She demands to know where her money is. When Earl promises to pay her back, she accuses him of giving the money to Mary-Louise. She then tells him that his wife is already with another man, but she hadn’t told him, out of respect. She begs Earl to let her take care of him and tells him that Mary-Louise is pregnant. Earl leaves.

Mr. Oji is making tea when he sees Olga on her way out carrying a suitcase. She tells him that a marriage has been arranged for her with a Russian boy, and that she is leaving. She tries to return the money he gave her, but he refuses to accept it. She takes it and disappears.

Mary-Louise’s room. Chet is talking to her about the baby when Earl comes in, angry and wondering what Chet is doing there. He accuses them of sleeping together behind his back. The confrontation gets physical, and Earl tells Mary-Louise that he knows she is pregnant and thinks it is Chet’s baby. Earl grabs Mary-Louise and is shaking her when Benji appears with Chet’s shotgun, threatening Earl to protect his sister. Chet manages to grab the gun from Benji, and when Earl attacks Benji, Chet turns the gun on him. Earl can’t believe that Chet would point a gun at him to defend a white man after all that has happened. He tells Chet that he thought they understood each other better, and leaves.

Back porch, evening. Chet plays his trumpet for the first time since Chicago.

The next morning. Mr. Goto comes looking for Olga, who is long gone. Goto acknowledges that Chet has done well with the boarding house, but that the city is planning to tear it all down. Mary-Louise and Benji are leaving with their suitcases. Leona watches. As they exit, they run into Earl, who goes into the house. Benji gives Lillian a photograph of himself standing in front of the boarding house. Earl promises Chet that he will send the back rent he owes and leaves, adding that he and Chet really didn’t know each other, after all. Mr. Oji passes Lillian and Chet on the way to his room. Lillian hands Chet Benji’s photograph. Chet thinks he knows what the picture portends—that the boarding house has been tagged for destruction. Lillian tells him that she listened to him play and liked it, and that they will find somewhere for him to play again.
FROM THE PLAYRIGHT

NO ONE IS EVER JUST ONE THING: THE LABEL THAT'S BEEN GIVEN TO THEM, THE DEFINITION THAT ONE HAS ACCEPTED AND LIVES WITHIN. NONE-THELESS, SO MUCH OF WHAT WE WORK AND LIVE BY SEEMS BASED ON THESE SEEMINGLY TRANSPARENT ASSUMPTIONS. . . . IN THE END WE ARE ALL BEINGS IN FLUX, IN CONTINUAL INVENTION AND REFORMATION. WE MUST USE SOCIAL LABELS AND SELF-DEFINING NAMES AS THEY SHOULD BE USED, AS CONVENIENT CONSTRUCTS TO GET A HANDLE ON THE SHIFTING WORLD, TO BE REPLACED BY MORE SUITABLE ONES AS THE WORLD SHIFTS AGAIN, AS WE SHIFT AGAIN.

—Philip Kan Gotanda, in the preface to No More Cherry Blossoms

Philip Kan Gotanda is a Sansei, a third-generation Japanese American. During World War II, his parents—both American citizens—were forced to leave their home and his father's medical practice in Stockton, California, and sent to the internment camp in Rohwer, Arkansas. After the war they returned to Stockton, where Gotanda was born in 1951. There he grew up with Japanese and American influences co-existing side by side, his perception of this country and its culture filtered through the lens of the Japanese-American community he was a part of, always tacitly aware of the painful legacy of the internment camp experience. As a young adult, while developing his professional skills at university and then law school, he also began to pursue an artistic life, first as a musician and then, in an unexpected turn, as a writer for theater and film.

Gotanda’s stories are steeped in an Asian-American sensibility; in their broad embrace of issues of tradition, identity, transition, racism (both internal and external), and ambition, however, they remain inclusive and unquestionably American. In his remarks to the cast on the first day of rehearsal of After the War at A.C.T., Gotanda said: “In my writing, I am in essence always trying to understand who I am in relationship to America and the fact that I come from, as we all do, some very complicated origins. As a playwright, you struggle to try to figure out where these throughlines all go in terms of the past and where they are going in the future. This is a play about what it means to be American, what it means to be American to another American, and then what it means to be American to America. All of those things are explored in this play, and I’d like to think they have a great deal of contemporary resonance for some of the issues going on now.”

Gotanda’s plays, written with a compassionate appreciation for both history and biography, have covered generations of Japanese-American life: a young girl’s romantic passions setting 1919 Hawaii ablaze in Ballad of Yachiyo (1995); a family of strong women returning from the camps
to their abandoned farm in Sisters Matsumoto (1999); an ardent college student caught up in Asian-American identity and gender politics in the 1960s in The Wind Cries Mary (2002); two actors defying Asian-American stereotypes of the 1980s in Yankee Dawg You Die (1987). In a 1992 interview describing an earlier play, The Wash (1985), Gotanda said, “Traditions which worked before are subject to the winds of change. I wanted to depict people struggling to live their lives after a serious rupture in the way things are.” The same could be said about After the War.

In a recent email interview with Margot Melcon, Gotanda described the process of creating After the War for A.C.T. and what it means to give voice to these characters facing a historical moment of radical transition unique to San Francisco.

I always carry themes, ideas, and snippets of stories around in my body, sometimes for years. Then at some point while working with one of these threads, I’ll find the disparate elements have woven themselves into a single narrative. In the case of After the War, there were several themes and areas of interest:

I had wanted to do something on the No-No Boys. I’d written about the heroism of the all-Nisei fighting units—the 442nd, the 100th Battalion, and others—and now wanted to look at the lesser-known, perhaps controversial side of that picture, those who did not serve as a form of protest, in this case, the No-No Boys. Interestingly, there is currently a Japanese-American soldier, Lieutenant Ehren Watada, who is being court-martialed for refusing deployment to Iraq on the grounds that it is an unconstitutional war. This incident has once again brought up similar issues that surrounded the No-No Boys within the Japanese-American community more than 60 years ago. Is he a coward and a traitor or a true patriot?
Another area of interest was the *Nisei* jazz musicians—prewar and postwar. Though not a well-known story, as a next-generation *Sansei* musician, I was fascinated by them and the sense of lineage they gave me. How they exemplified the degree to which *Nisei* were Americanized, participating in the popular cultural expression of this country, in particular, with an African-American idiom.

Another facet was the idea of there being a moment of intersection of the Japanese-American and African-American communities in a postwar, San Francisco neighborhood, and what that might have meant to them. At that time there was growing discontent in the African-American community. They had lost their wartime jobs; returning soldiers found a country as racist as when they left it. Japanese Americans, in turn, were ambivalent about their place in America. After being imprisoned by their own country, they resettled into their old neighborhood only to have shop windows broken, racist epithets scribbled across storefronts, and in extreme cases, beatings and shootings. Would these two groups, living side by side, develop a sense of crosscultural community built on the commonality of exclusion from the center? Or would the distrust that marginalized communities have of each other win over? This time, this place in San Francisco history, is a unique American story.

I also enjoyed the challenge of filling this boardinghouse with a variety of peoples whom I had yet to write about in great detail. And having these people mix it up, get into each other’s lives, see relationships, affairs of people whom the American stage has not seen before. I found it both worthy of telling and exciting to write about.

As to the process and evolution of this play, in 2003 I had done my play *Yohen* (about an elderly African American–Japanese interracial couple) with A.C.T. It was a staging of a work I was anxious to revisit, and Carey [Perloff] and A.C.T. were supportive of the idea of revisiting that work with a fresh approach. The production was a critical success. I
worked with Steven [Anthony Jones], we all had fun, and Carey asked if I’d like to write a new work for them. She suggested adapting the Akutagawa-based film *Rashomon*. As an admirer of Akutagawa and it being one of my favorite Kurosawa films, I readily agreed.

The film is actually based on a combination of two of Akutagawa’s short stories. As far as the play that goes by that name, the script I read appears to simply be a direct copy of the film without credit to the screenplay. I initially tried several approaches to the Kurosawa adaptation. Someone had related a story to me about an elderly woman whose heirs were trying to get the court to declare her mentally unfit to care for herself. Various versions of a critical moment in her life seemed a promising way to go. No luck. Then I thought I’d try updating the storyline to the present. No luck. Then placing the story in a historical context. No luck. Then an idea for a play I’d been working on, off and on, found legs as I worked on one of these approaches. That’s how the writing of *After the War* came about.

As happens when I write, sometimes the story develops in a straight line, and other times, it veers off in another direction. This happens often with me. That’s how we started with *Rashomon* and ended up with *After the War*. To Carey’s and a.c.t.’s credit, they were fine with that. If you look closely you’ll see some of *Rashomon* in there.

I’d never written for a company before and I was excited about the challenge of writing characters tailored for specific actors. Initially the play had roles for all the company. But as the current season took shape, Marco [Barricelli] had moved on, René [Augesen] was fully committed to *Hedda Gabler*, Allison [Jean White] had yet to join the company, and Gregory [Wallace], though wonderful in so many ways, was not quite right for the role of the Japanese-American accountant (he almost pulled it off). It’s fitting that Steven is the sole company actor in this production. Steven and I had developed a good working relationship in *Yohen*, and he’s been the anchor actor for this play from its inception. I still would love the challenge of writing a piece involving the entire core company.

Now that we’re well into rehearsal, I’m more than enthused with our cast. Some I’ve worked with more than 20 years, others more recently, and several for the first time. Having a cast with a balance of people familiar with my work helps the rehearsal process. What I do appreciate about this group is they are all strong contributors to the writing process. All their questions and ideas have urged this play along immeasurably.

Though the writing is now verging on four years, it’s all been forward movement. Each meeting, conference, reading, retreat, and workshop, whether by phone from Tokyo or Sheridan, Wyoming, whether in person at Sundance, Asia Society in New York, or here at a.c.t., has moved the story ahead steadily so the work has never felt labored or redundant. And Carey Perloff, who as the director has been working on this piece from the beginning, has given incalculable insight, support, and friendship, throughout.
A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PHILIP KAN GOTOnda

Philip Kan Gotanda has been a major influence in the broadening of the definition of theater in America over the last two and a half decades. He has been one of the Bay Area’s most active playwrights, working with San Francisco’s Asian American Theater Company (AATC), Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Campo Santo + Intersection for the Arts, the Eureka Theatre, Locus Arts, Magic Theatre, San Jose Repertory Theatre, and A.C.T. Other theaters with which he has worked include East West Players, Boston’s Huntington Theatre Company, Manhattan Theatre Club, the Mark Taper Forum, Missouri Repertory Theatre, the New York Shakespeare Festival, Northwest Asian American Theater, Pan Asian Repertory Theatre, Playwrights Horizons, The Robey Theatre Company, Seattle Repertory Theatre, and South Coast Repertory, among others.

Gotanda’s works are also presented internationally; his play Ballad of Yachiyo was produced at London’s Gate Theatre in coproduction with the National Theatre, and a Japanese-language version of his play Sisters Matsumoto opened in Tokyo last year at the Mingei Theatre. A new collection of his plays, No More Cherry Blossoms, was published by the University of Washington Press. Among his honors are Guggenheim, TCG/NEA, Rockefeller, Pew Charitable Trust, Civil Liberties Public Education Fund, and Lila Wallace–Readers’ Digest awards.

Gotanda is also a respected independent filmmaker, his works seen in festivals around the world. His three films—The Kiss, Drinking Tea, and Life Tastes Good—have all been screened at Sundance. Life Tastes Good, which Gotanda wrote and directed, can be seen on the Independent Film Channel (the DVD is widely available). He is currently working on his next film with his business partners, Dale Minami and Diane Takei. Gotanda collaborated with Maestro Kent Nagano of the Berkeley Symphony and Berlin Philharmonic and composers Jean-Pascal Beintus, David Benoit, and Naomi Sekiya on an orchestral work with spoken text, Manzanar: An American Story, about the Japanese-American internment during World War II.

In his career Gotanda has embodied the heart and spirit of an artist dedicated to the telling of his own particular world’s stories, in his own particular way. In the process he has created one of the largest and most varied bodies of work about Asians in America. Gotanda continues his personal project of mentoring young artists. He holds a law degree from Hastings College of Law, studied pottery in Japan with the late Hiroshi Seto, and resides in Berkeley with his actress-producer wife, Diane Takei.
The idea was this: 2006–07 is A.C.T.’s 40th-anniversary season in San Francisco, and we wanted to do two things. One was to look back at and celebrate the past of this theater, and the other was to create something for the future. When you run a theater that has a thousand seats, it’s very difficult to find literature that is muscular enough in its ideas, its execution, its language, and its cast size to fill that house. And I think it’s uniquely appropriate that one of the dedicatees of this play is August Wilson, one of the great 20th- and 21st-century playwrights, whose imagination was capacious enough and whose language was rich enough and emotional range was vast enough to consistently fill that stage. It’s a wonderful thing that Philip has dedicated *After the War*, in part, to August, because this play carries forward that spirit in many ways, as well as the sense that only by remembering touchstone moments in American history can we know what it means to live in *this* moment.

From our point of view as Americans, the questions we ask ourselves about our relationship to our ancestry and our past, and about our vision of the future, don’t seem to settle easily. Maybe that’s why we’re such a restless, longing nation. Right at this moment, as we think about what our immigration policy should be, who should be allowed into this country, bilingualism, what it means to be black—Is somebody not black enough because his father was African, not African American?—we continue to struggle with our fascination with our own individual ancestry and our need as a country to have some collective vision that moves us forward. That’s what this play is really about, for me.

It’s very hard for us, as 21st-century Americans, particularly those of us who are lucky enough to live in the San Francisco area, to cast our minds back to the mindset of 1948. One of the things I love about this play is that it is very true to the cultural predilections and prejudices and fears and issues of its own period. So we have to be very careful not to bring our own contemporary sense of things to the inner lives of these characters, because they are who they are at the moment in history that the play finds them.

The late 1940s was a moment of enormous expectation for almost every American, I think. This play takes place in the period just coming out of the war years, and many, many things had shifted. For women, it was a particularly fascinating and rich period, and the women in this play are renegades by definition at this moment in history. The ’40s ushered
in a period of unfamiliar independence for women. They had their own checking accounts; were heads of their own households; were alone with their children, their parents, or whomever, during the long period when the men were gone to war. It’s somewhat of a cliché, now, but the Rosie the Riveter syndrome was true: women started working in industries they’d never been in before. They were much more mobile. Often they had to move long distances to find work. And suddenly the end of the war came, and the prism started to shift back again, and we were headed into that moment in American history in the early 1950s, when women were meant to stay home and procreate.

This was also the beginning of convenience culture, and of marketing culture, and the beginning of the television industry. It’s hard for us to imagine how few televisions there were in 1948, and most of them were on the East Coast, particularly in New York. So, although Mr. Oji [in After the War] is very snide and says he’s seen television before, that “there’s a bigger one in the Emporium,” in fact television in 1948 was an incredibly exciting anomaly that almost nobody would have seen in a home. Particularly not in the neighborhood where this play is set. This was also the beginning of the availability of labor-saving devices, which Mary-Louise fantasizes about—there was a sense of enormous potential, that things should happen for women, and yet there was also a slightly uneasy questioning of the role women were supposed to play once the men had come home after all that waiting.

The African-American experience is also very interesting. Before the war, there was only a tiny black population in the Bay Area, but as soon as the shipyard industry started to erupt with defense contracts, this became a lucrative place to work. So therewas a big migration, and by the end of the war there were more than 30,000 African Americans, in Alameda and Oakland, but also in the Fillmore. So oddly, for a brief period, there was far more racial intermingling than had been possible before. And when the Japanese Americans came back from internment, a variety of things happened, which nobody in the American government seems to have planned for. There was no systematic plan of reintegration. How you returned depended on whether you were lucky enough to have friends or friendly strangers willing to watch over your property. This was not only urban property in San Francisco, but farmland, as well. There are a lot of theories, but one of the theories about why the Japanese Americans were removed was that they had the most lucrative farms in California. They were incredibly adept farmers—they practically had a monopoly on the strawberry crop—and a lot of the most productive land was owned by Japanese-American farmers who were removed from it. Other people—white Americans—took it over. Some Japanese Americans got their farms back, but only very few. And the same thing happened with the housing stock when they returned.
One of the great tragedies and mysteries of the postwar period is what happened with the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency when the Japanese Americans moved back to the city. Those people in municipal government believed, I'm sure, that they were moving forward and doing the right thing; the housing stock the Japanese Americans had owned during the war in Japantown was not great stock to begin with, and after they'd been gone for four years and nobody had kept it up and too many people were renting it, that housing stock started to really deteriorate. So after the war, there was this plan by the Planning and Housing Association to remove “urban blight.” We found documents, right from the agency itself, that are hair-raising, describing crime and health statistics in the Fillmore and Western Addition and what a terrible place that was to live and how the solution was to tear everything down and build new housing. Of course, there was no real plan for what was going to happen to all the people displaced from that housing. This has happened again and again in cities all over the United States: Detroit, New York, Cleveland, San Francisco, Oakland, New Orleans. In the attempt to get rid of old stock and rebuild, thousands of people get displaced, and when it’s rebuilt they can’t afford to move back.

[Scenic designer] Donald Eastman and I, when we were doing research for this production, drove around streets in San Francisco like Fair Oaks, streets in the Mission, places where boarding houses like the one in this play still exist. They don’t exist in Japantown, anymore, because they were torn down. It’s almost impossible to wrap your head around the fact that after being forcibly removed and sent to those unspeakable camps for three years, the Japanese Americans came back to reclaim what was left of their property, and then three years later got tags on their houses that said, “This building has been tagged for urban renewal. You have three weeks to vacate.” It’s unbelievable that this happened, again.

The reason I bring this up is that that little piece of history, that instability, runs through the play, and it is a tricky thing, in terms of plot. Philip and I have talked about this extensively as we’ve been working on the play. There is no reason this play has to serve any historical need that Philip doesn’t want it to serve—it’s a character play, and it should fulfill its own creative destiny—but the context is that this very boarding house, which Mr. Goto has lent Chester the money for, is in fact part of the landscape of Japantown that will be tagged and torn down. So the Housing Association is taking photographs of those buildings, which are the pictures Benji carries around. Chester is desperately attempting to create something out of nothing in making a go of this boarding house, but we see in the bigger context that we’re not sure it will actually survive, anyway.

The other thing I want to say that may help you contextualize the story is that, and I didn’t know this before, there was a thriving Japanese-American jazz scene, even in the 1920s and ’30s. And jazz was a powerful integrator. There were Japanese-American jazz
bands, but there were also, to some degree, integrated jazz bands. It’s so surprising to Earl, who is a Perry Como nut—he’s really square, that Earl [laugh]—that Chester was a successful jazz musician, who played with Lionel Hampton and other major big band musicians in the period before the war. Even in the internment camps, there were all kinds of swing bands, and one of the songs they played was “Don't Fence Me In,” which is deeply ironic, but they continued to play the popular dance tunes of the period. So this is a play about jazz musician who has stopped playing music, which is an incredibly painful thing.

Jazz in the 1940s was quite different from the mainstream music that was played in the 1930s and '40s. Jazz already had its own subversive counterculture and its own gestalt. Chester talks a lot about trust and what happens when you get up with a group of people you don’t know, and if you can play, you can play—whatever you look like or wherever you come from, your musicianship is what’s important. He carries that with him, but he comes back to a city that is deeply distrustful. It’s important to remember that the Japanese Americans returned to a culture that was still highly distrustful of them. Anti-Japanese sentiment did not begin in 1942. It’s upsetting to read these editorials now, but San Francisco newspapers had a legacy of virulently anti-Japanese and anti-Chinese sentiment, with vicious editorializing, going back decades. The desire to get rid of the Japanese population was conveniently exercised during the war, but it didn’t start during the war. When the Japanese Americans came back from the camps, nobody knew what to say. There were people who wished they wouldn’t come back and still carried that feeling with them, and there were people who knew that a terrible wrong had been perpetrated, but they hadn’t done anything to stand up against it, and they didn’t know how to respond.

As a descendant of Viennese Jews who discussed the Holocaust endlessly and loudly, to make sure its horrors would never be forgotten, I was stunned when I started researching this play to discover that that was not at all true of the Japanese-American experience. The internment experience was not discussed. That sense of shame is very hard for me to understand. [She shows the cast a copy of Impounded, Dorothea Lange’s photographic documentation of the internment experience.] These photographs were commissioned by the federal government during the WPA period and later impounded, because they took one look at them and said, “Oh no, no, no, we don't want these pictures published in American newspapers.” Why? Because they’re pictures of beautiful little Japanese-American children saying the pledge of allegiance or holding baseball gloves, tagged to be sent away to prison camps. What you see in these photographs is a culture that was trying to assimilate, and who really deeply believed, as Chester says in his monologue, in America and American values.

American culture was much less authoritarian, much less hierarchical, much more fluid, and much more open to class mobility than Japanese culture. This is a group of people, the
Nisei, American-born Japanese, who had gone or were going to American high schools. American culture was a kind of manna for the Nisei, and they believed in it, believed they were part of it, and believed that this was a great democracy and that Roosevelt was the great democratic president. So to be told by that democracy and that president, “You are now enemy aliens,” was very different, I realize, than for Jews to be told that by the Nazis, since the Jews knew that the Nazis were insane, and it wasn’t a democratic government telling them that they were the enemy, it was a group of fascist fanatics.

Japanese Americans internalized that sense of shame, that somehow they had failed the country they had so desperately wanted to be part of. And yet, while they therefore felt excluded from American culture, they could not be part of Japanese culture anymore, either. Philip’s wife [Diane Takei] tells an amazing story about her uncle, who fought on the Japanese side of the war, and her father, who fought on the American side. How do you wrap your head around that? When you watch the film Letters from Iwo Jima, which is about what happened on the Japanese side of the war, you realize that those young Japanese men are exactly the same generation as Chester and his brother in this play. Many Japanese Americans, like Chester’s brother, did fight for the United States. He might have been fighting his own cousins.

So what happened after the war? The internees came back and wanted to move on and pretend the whole thing hadn’t happened. And the people who are the salt in the wound, who remind everybody that this terrible thing did in fact happen, are the No-No Boys. Because they didn’t assimilate well, because they were rebels. That’s why Mr. Goto is so angry at Chester: he feels it’s his role to come back as a leader of the Japanese Americans. It was people like Goto in the Japanese American Citizen League, the JAACL, the assimilationist group, who very much wanted Japanese Americans to go to the camps without protest, to behave as loyal Americans, to continue to commit to their lives as Americans, and to return and reintegrate into the culture. But rebels like Chester were a constant reminder of the shame of internment, of their condemnation and rejection by the rest of American society.

One of the questions we wrestled with as Philip was writing the play was, What is it that Chester wants in this boarding house? What is he trying to do? It would have been relatively unusual for people of such different backgrounds to end up living in the same house, but there really wasn’t any other place for them to move to. Even for people who had rent money to spend, there was no housing available. So Chester has this idea that it’s possible for this disparate group of people to live together in harmony. One of the poignant things about the play is that, in the end, the boarding house empties out. Chester’s dream
isn't possible, yet. Or easy. There's no history of trust among the groups these people represent. So the friendship between Earl and Chester—even though they work together and laugh together and eat each other’s weird food and enjoy each other—ultimately doesn't have enough foundation to endure, when difficult issues like sexual conflict arise. It will take another 50 years and beyond of developing trust between Asian and African Americans for a relationship like that to sustain itself.

Olga has been living in Japan for a year, so she's another cultural hybrid, who speaks Russian and a little bit of Japanese and English. Many Eastern European and Russian Jews came to San Francisco via Japan and Shanghai, actually. The Jews got out of Europe in all kinds of ways. They went east because they couldn't go west any more; when the British weren't allowing the Jews in and they couldn't get out of France or Germany that way, they could go through the Soviet Union, where the Jews were not wanted anyway, but were forced out in pogroms, and get out to the east. I think Olga has had a rough way out. She's already had the pogrom experience. She's made a deal with somebody to get out in their pay, and she ends up here as a kind of indentured slave, in Mr. Goto's keep. He puts her in this boarding house, and Donald [Eastman]'s given her a little room down below the stairs, because she has to be ready at seven o'clock every night to entertain Mr. Goto. Lillian knows that, and has the room prepared and his liquor ready and everybody knows about and facilitates the arrangement. Financially Chester is very beholden to Mr. Goto, who knew his parents very well. The boarding house wouldn't run without Goto’s money.

In terms of Mary-Louise, again it’s very interesting to me what an independent spirit this woman must have been. In that period, to leave Oklahoma on her own and go to Chicago, with no visible means of support and a brother to take care of, was a very unusual and bold thing to do, and I think that's why she's so messed up. She and Chester ended up in this terrible drug scene in Chicago, and barely pulled each other out of it. He saved her in the end by letting her come and stay for very little rent in this boarding house, which works so long as they keep the lines between them quite carefully drawn. But they have a very complicated history. It’s subtly layered into the play, but Lillian knows that Chester was an addict, and it’s another problem for him within the mainstream Japanese-American community. He's not just an ex–jazz musician and a No-No Boy, he’s an ex-junkie. And they know it.

Benji knows a lot, as well, because he’s absorbed it all. Without necessarily processing it, he knows the whole history between Mary-Louise and Chester. He also knows that Chester has looked out for him. They do a lot together: they dig for worms; they clean up; Benji helps with the tv antenna. Chester understands something about Benji and how he needs to be looked after, which is a much harder thing for Earl. Earl, I think, wishes that
Mary Louise would come to him on her own. It’s hard enough that he has his own daughter to deal with. And he’s from Mississippi, which has very different expectations about what’s permissible between a black man and a white woman. She tells him, “This isn’t the South any more.” But now that the war is over, the work is drying up, the men are coming home, and the prejudice is back, even in a place as relatively integrated as San Francisco. It’s very emasculating for these black men, who briefly had jobs and money and the status that went with them, and now they’re just swimming.

I thought about Lillian a lot in looking at photographs of the camps. I can not imagine what it must have been like to get pregnant in those camps. There was virtually no privacy. Entire families were crammed together in single horse stalls in the assembly centers, where everybody was on their own little mats in the same space. The bathrooms had no divisions; everybody would have known everything. Even finding a place to commit the act that left her pregnant—in the back of somebody’s truck, or something—must have taken an effort; it couldn’t have just “happened.” And then, everybody would have known. The shame and humiliation that Lillian must have felt as an unmarried, abandoned pregnant woman must be equal to what Chester feels as a No-No Boy. And then she lost the baby. There isn’t a person in her camp that wouldn’t have known that.

At least Chester is family. For this girl to move in, alone, to this boarding house with this notorious guy and all these crazy people—what must her family have thought? Then I realized that her family must have completely rejected her, and she really doesn’t have any place else to go. So the stakes are very high for her. She’s not a mouse, but she’s nobody’s fool. She knows that she has to cater to Mr. Goto because she knows that’s where the power lies, but she also knows what it is to have been shamed, and to have been pregnant, which is why she is sympathetic to the other women in the play.

Philip has written a very Chekhovian play, in which everyone has his or her own journey. Everybody falls in love, as in a Chekhov play, with the wrong person (except maybe Chester and Lillian). Mary-Louise is caught between her past relationship with Chester, whom she trusts, and this new love affair with Earl that’s very hot sexually but makes her nervous about whether there’s any future in it. Earl is drawn to Mary-Louise, but I think there’s a piece of him that feels at home when Leona comes, bringing memories of his past and his own people, and he knows instinctively that he can trust her. It’s interesting to observe where in the play Leona sniffs that something is going on with Earl and Mary-Louise. Just imagine living in that boarding house! Lillian watching but not sure—it’s a real transgression for her to fall in love with her ex-fiancé’s brother, so she doesn’t let that happen for a long time. Olga knows that it’s forbidden for her, according to Mr. Goto’s rules, to fraternize with anybody else, so when it happens with Mr. Oji it’s very dangerous.
A lot of the staging of this play is a very delicate charting of all of this crosscultural life taking place, which informs us in the bigger picture about the tensions in the culture at large. Ultimately we will want to keep our eye on all of these shifting alliances, while at the same time trying to make sure that the bigger picture is glimpsed just enough that we understand what the characters are struggling against, why they have such a complicated time in this building, and what happens to them when they walk out of it.

This was an enormously difficult play to design, because it’s written much like a screen-play, and we had to figure out how to make it visual. One of the things Philip often does in his writing is to have a primary action going on center stage while there are secondary and tertiary actions taking place at the same time, somewhere else. For example, Leona may be sitting there counting her money, while Mr. Oji and Olga are having their tea, and Lillian’s alone in the office, and each one of those stories has its own integrity. How we do that is very particular, because there will be moments when we learn something important emotionally, but there’s no scripted text; we’ll have to find that and choreograph it as we go along. So this play will be quite complicated on its feet. And as we see it unfold in rehearsal Philip may decide to reorder scenes and move things around. So make sure your notes are erasable!

Donald is brilliant at figuring out where things live in relation to the audience. If you’ve ever lived in a commune—I have [laugh]—you know that everyone has their communal moments, and then each person has their shelf in the kitchen, and their one little place where they can be private. And then there are those moments when everybody’s keys are in the same place and somebody’s coming home and going to bed just as somebody else is getting up and leaving, and you run into each other and find out embarrassing things about each other. Philip has scripted all these wonderful moments in there, so, for example, Mary-Louise, who works in a taxi dance hall and is up all night, sleeps all day, and is in her slip at four o’clock in the afternoon, ready to get dressed, runs into somebody else who is just coming home from work. It’s that kind of world.

DONALD EASTMAN, SCENIC DESIGNER
Quite simply, the first question Carey and I came to in creating this set was, How can we be in the parlor, but see through into the dining room, which has become an office and Chester’s bedroom, through that into the kitchen, where everything happens? Where is the stairway that pulls all of that life together? The hallway that connects it all? And how can we create that while at the same time being true to San Francisco architecture?

When the curtain goes up, we first see this suggestive form, where the essentials are there, but a lot of the walls have gone away. This set is composed as a sculpture, more so
than a realistic box set. And then once we establish this place, and people moving through it, it has the ability to rotate. So all of a sudden we’re moving through the parlor, and we’re viewing the house from the rear. So an action that was happening in the front, is still happening there, while we’re focusing on what’s going on in the kitchen. And then there’s the back porch—classic. I really can’t think of any place other than San Francisco where I know and have seen these forms, connected to everything in the back of the building.

Philip gave us a real challenge, in that we also go upstairs to someone’s bedroom. In the original script we went up to several characters’ bedrooms, but we worked through the play to find where the common spaces are that some of those actions could take place. Who spends most of their time in the kitchen? Who spends their time in the backyard, or hanging out high on the porch? It all came down to composition. And at the same time not turning it into a realistic set, but letting this “painting” sort of fly. We also came up with the image of a raft, with these people floating through on it. It all sits in a black void, and the furniture is being simply selected so it doesn’t fill out as much as it would in life. So it’s about the actors, wearing the right clothes, sitting in the right chair, holding the right object, and this sculpture is just kind of holding them in.
PHILIP KAN GOTANDA, PLAYWRIGHT

I would just like to add that the internment experience was a very complicated moment for the Japanese-American community. In many ways, what it did was change the course of their being Americans in America forever. Chester, our central character, a Nisei, is someone who believed he was an American, was into American jazz, which is a black idiom, was playing with black groups, and then he suddenly realizes that everything he believed in, his house, his family, this place he considered himself to be a part of, has turned against him. For some Nisei, it was almost like an abused child syndrome; it’s almost as if their parents said to them, “You’re bad.” Especially in Japanese culture, that kind of shame is internalized. And that throughline carries forward even to today. There’s an aspect of being Japanese American that has been affected by the camps and affects the behavior of even third-, fourth-, and fifth-generation Japanese Americans.

I also want to mention that there was a great deal of divisiveness, dispute, internally, in the camps, to the point that there were people who were very pro-Japan, those who had been born there, who were in these sort of mini-gangs in particular camps, who would go around and beat up those who were pro-America. There were beatings, fights, families that broke down because the parent might be more pro-Japan, and the child might think more along the lines of enlisting. All of these things were happening in the camps, while people were also trying to maintain some kind of normal life—dances, dating, living, being born, dying. All that was going on amidst a great deal of psychological dysfunction. So Chester comes out of that and steps into the world after he’s taken a very controversial stand, which, as Carey said, makes him a pariah in his own community, which remembers that many Japanese Americans, the young men, went and served and died and paid with their blood. Chester comes into this situation not having served, saying, “I didn’t want to serve,” and trying to reintegrate back into a community that has embraced the idea that they are Americans, they paid with their blood, and they’ve earned their place in society. But Chester refused to pay that price, so he becomes the target of all their scorn.

One of the reasons I write about this is that, in my writing, I am in essence always trying to understand who I am in relationship to America and the fact that I come from, as we all do, some very complicated origins. As a playwright, you struggle to try to figure out where these throughlines all go in terms of the past and where they are going in the future. This is a play about what it means to be American, what it means to be American to another American, and then what it means to be American to America. All of those things are explored in this play, and I’d like to think they have a great deal of contemporary resonance for some of the issues going on now.
“THE FILLMORE WAS TOUGH, BUT HAPPENIN’”

BY ELIZABETH BRODERSEN

“THIS IS MY HOUSE, YOU HEAR ME? THIS IS MY HOUSE. AND NO ONE’S TAKING IT AWAY FROM ME EVER AGAIN.”

—Chester Monkawa, in an early draft of *After the War*

The story of San Francisco’s Fillmore district—like that of the characters of Philip Kan Gotanda’s newest play—is one of continuing migration, exile, transition, and renewal. Offering a haven, at least temporarily, to the “huddled masses” and displaced minorities who have made their way to America’s western shore, the neighborhood has for more than a century been home to generations of wanderers seeking to find a better place in this strange and often hostile land.

AN EARLY MELTING POT

Before 1906, the Fillmore district—roughly defined as the 20 square blocks around the street from which the neighborhood takes its name—was a quiet, largely white, middle-class community with a multicultural blend of Jews, immigrants, and a few African Americans. When the earthquake and fire left most of downtown in ruins, businesses and city offices quickly set up shop on Fillmore Street—the closest major thoroughfare left undamaged—establishing temporary quarters in ornate Victorian mansions to form the new center of the devastated city’s commercial and political life.

Japanese immigrants, who had begun to trickle into San Francisco following the establishment of the first Japanese consulate on the U.S. mainland in 1870, followed, abandoning ruined homes and businesses in Chinatown and the South Park neighborhood south of
Market Street. Soon the trickle became a flood, and the new Japanese enclave in the Fillmore became known as Nihonmachi, or Japantown. There the new residents and their children, the Japanese-American Nisei, thrived, and by 1940, the Japanese population of Nihonmachi would grow to more than 5,000, with more than 200 Japanese-owned businesses.

Since the Fillmore was one of the few areas in San Francisco where nonwhites were permitted by local race laws to own or rent property, other displaced groups crowded into the area, as well, and Filipinos, Mexicans, and African Americans enriched the neighborhood mix. To support the burgeoning population, single-family Victorians were converted into multiple dwellings and boardinghouses. Synagogues, kosher delis, and Japanese grocers and restaurants mingled with diners and cafes and African-American barber shops, churches, and funeral parlors throughout the 1920s and 1930s. With its integrated schools and businesses, the Fillmore/Japantown area became recognized as one of the most diverse neighborhoods west of the Mississippi.

As the temporary commercial and political transplants made their way back to their pre-earthquake downtown locations, Fillmore merchants hoping to maintain the neighborhood’s status as a popular destination began to open entertainment halls and amusement parks, including the Dreamland Rink (known for boxing and wrestling matches) at Steiner and Post and the famous Majestic Auditorium at Geary and Fillmore, originally a dance palace and later made legendary by rock promoter Bill Graham.

As the neighborhood came into its own, musicians and other performers got in on the act, with clubs popping up all over the area. Jack’s Tavern on Sutter, the first club in the Fillmore to welcome, promote, and be managed by African Americans, opened in 1933, followed by the Club Alabam and the Town Club. Within a few years, dozens of hot spots had opened their doors, including the New Orleans Swing Club, the Long Bar, the California Theater, Elsie’s Breakfast Nook, the Texas Playhouse, the Booker T. Washington Hotel lounge, the Champagne Supper Club, Leola King’s Blue Mirror, and Jimbo’s Bop City. The Fillmore was it.

"Harlem West"
And then came Pearl Harbor. Within days after the attack, the u.s. government ordered the evacuation of all persons of Japanese ancestry from the entire West Coast. And within weeks of the evacuation announcement, Nihonmachi was a ghost town, most of its homes and businesses left boarded up and eerily vacant.
At the same time, job-hungry African Americans and others—including many women—migrated to San Francisco from all over the country to find work in Bay Area shipyards, where defense contracts offered lucrative opportunities. A ban on nonwhites by nearly all labor unions had previously kept San Francisco’s black population small; in 1940, only 4,846 African Americans lived in the city, most in the Fillmore. Between 1940 and 1944, however, more than 500,000 people moved to the Bay Area, and more than 30,000 of them were black. Prohibited from taking up residence in white neighborhoods (the Fillmore, Hunters Point, and Bayview were among the few places where blacks were allowed to live), the new San Franciscans took up every inch of space made available by the departing Japanese. The Fillmore’s residences were soon crammed with incoming workers, as their families doubled, tripled, and quadrupled up, using bathrooms and kitchens—and often sleeping—in shifts.

All these newcomers needed services, and soon a flourishing neighborhood of black-run shops, restaurants, banks, medical offices, and churches lined the streets of the Fillmore. The music scene boomed right along with the war industry, and jazz greats came from all over the country to perform in the area, which became known as a kind of “Harlem West”: Dinah Washington, Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, Chet Baker, John Coltrane, Ella Fitzgerald, Oscar Peterson, Louis Armstrong, Nat King Cole. Even white performers, after finishing their performances in other parts of town, would finish out the night in after-hours Fillmore spots like the Havana Club, Elsie’s, and, especially, the ever-popular Bop City.

“The Fillmore was a true melting pot,” drummer Earl Watkins, born in the Fillmore in 1920 and raised there, told the San Francisco Examiner in 1995. “People loved the liberalism. It was mixed. If you came to the clubs, you might find yourself sitting at a table next to Billie Holliday or some other legend. Everybody ended up at Bop City before the evening was through. Whoever was in town would be wined and dined and then they’d play a set—not their club routine, but something special. You might have Basie’s rhythm section stretching out, getting away from their arrangements. It was marvelous.” (More about Watkins and the history of the neighborhood can be found in Harlem of the West: The San Francisco Fillmore Jazz Era, Elizabeth Pepin and Lewis Watts’s chronicle of the Fillmore in its heyday.)

When the Japanese Americans returned in 1944, their old homes and businesses were largely gone. Temporary housing was mostly full, and many were treated with mistrust and often violence. By 1950, they were far outnumbered by whites and African Americans in

OPPOSITE Photos of everyday life in the Fillmore, 1940s. Top left photo courtesy Red Powell/Reggie Pettus Collection; bottom right photo courtesy Steve Jackson Jr; both from Harlem of the West. All other photos courtesy of San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.
the neighborhood. Yet, for a while, the Fillmore's historical character as a place of toler-
ance allowed a fragile truce to prevail across the district’s overlapping borders.

“When prejudice was rampant, people in the Fillmore were not thinking in those
terms,” said Allen Smith (also to the Examiner), a trumpet player who served 28 years as a
teacher and principal in San Francisco’s public schools. “They were thinking of acceptance.
All the good kinds of feelings—love, honesty, and trust. The attitude was: ‘Come on in,
you’re our guest and friend, have a good time.’ As far as I’m concerned, it was the most
beautiful time I’ve known.”

“In the old days, we used to cross the street all the time,” said Japanese-American com-

munity activist Steve Nakajo, who moved to Japantown with his family in 1956. Nakajo
describes his childhood in Harlem of the West: “I had a mixed group of friends. Japanese,
Filipino, Black. Mixed, like the neighborhood. We had the j-town walk. The j-town feel.
When we got down to the Fillmore, we’d check everyone out and they’d check us out,
because you had to know who your rivals were. The Fillmore was tough, but happenin’.”

“FILL-NO-MORE”
Already by the mid 1940s, however, city authorities had begun to look at the Fillmore's
aging, dilapidated, overcrowded housing stock with a condemning eye. The San Francisco
Redevelopment Agency—formed in 1948, when After the War takes place—began to pho-
tograph and tag “uninhabitable” buildings in the neighborhood for demolition in an
attempt to cure the urban “blight” they saw in this predominantly poor and mixed-race, if
thriving, neighborhood. Twenty-seven blocks of the Western Addition, including much of
Japantown, were selected as one of the first large-scale urban renewal projects in the
United States.

Over the next two decades, most of the neighborhood was taken by eminent domain
and bulldozed away to make room for high-rise apartments, new businesses, and a
widened Geary Street intended to improve access to the financial district for residents of
the Richmond neighborhood. Owners were typically forced to accept much less than their
property was worth.

The experience was especially painful for Japanese-American residents who had just
begun to recover from the losses of internment. “When redevelopment began, the vibrant
community I knew, my friends, my whole world, started to change,” remembers Nakajo in
Harlem of the West. “I used to look down the street and see nothing but Victorians. And
then, at one point, you’d leave in the morning and there would be a bulldozer parked in
front of some buildings, and by the time you came back from school, the houses weren’t
there anymore. Block by block, gone. Totally leveled.
“The relocation camps took almost everything away from the Japanese community, and then to be able to hold it all somehow while you’re at camp, then come back after the war and reestablish yourself just to have the Redevelopment Agency come and declare eminent domain and take away your house? Incredible.”

Despite official promises that they could someday move back into affordable housing, the Fillmore’s impoverished, now largely unemployed African-American and recently returned Japanese-American residents were forced into the street by the very government charged with protecting their interests. Ten thousand African Americans and thousands of Japanese Americans were displaced. Two hundred black-owned businesses and sixty businesses in Japantown were eliminated. A once-flourishing community was reduced to 64 square blocks of dust and gravel.

In its place, the Japanese-owned, Osaka-based Kintetsu Enterprises of America built a modern mall, adding luxury apartments, a hotel, a shopping center, a Japanese trade and cultural center, and the Kabuki movie theater. The widened Geary Street became a kind of Mason-Dixon line between Japantown in the North and the African-American community of the Western Addition to the South.

Very few previous residents were able to return to the neighborhood, which contained less than half the housing units it had in 1950. By the 1970s, the Fillmore had become not so affectionately known as the “Fill-No-More,” and the area’s touted “urban renewal” was commonly referred to as “Negro removal.”

One of just three remaining Japantowns (with San Jose and Los Angeles) in the United States, San Francisco’s *Nihonmachi* has been reduced to less than five blocks, and fewer than ten of the original Japanese-American businesses remain. Among them are the Okamura family’s Benkyodo (now at Sutter and Buchanan), which has been making *manju* since 1906, and the Uoki Market (at Post and Buchanan), which also opened in 1906 and is still owned by the Sakai family. Of the original jazz clubs that once kept the neighborhood hopping, only John Lee Hooker’s Boom Boom Room (formerly Jack’s Tavern; now at Fillmore and Geary), remains. Bop City closed for good in 1965, its building dragged around the corner to a new location on Fillmore Street, where it now houses Marcus Books, San Francisco’s largest African-American bookstore.

With the 1980s came a kind of renaissance, as upscale restaurants and shops staked out several blocks of upper Fillmore Street and gentrification of residential properties advanced. Distrust and anger still simmer as community groups struggle to hold on to the neighborhood’s historical character, and attempts at healing have sometimes succeeded. The Julia Morgan–designed Japantown *YWCA* on Sutter Street, for example, one of the few structures built before World War II to survive redevelopment, was saved for the commu-
nity in 2002 when its ownership was secured for Nihonmachi Little Friends, a community-run day care center housed in the building. And the Ohabai Shalome Temple, or Bush Street Synagogue—which was built in 1895 and, since the synagogue closed in 1934, has housed consecutively a Soto Zen church, a black Baptist church, the San Francisco Zen Center, and a samurai movie theater—in 2000 became part of the Kokoro Assisted Living Center for low- and moderate-income elderly Asian Americans. The synagogue’s sanctuary is now Kokoro’s dining room and gathering place, where a Japanese star has replaced the Ten Commandments on the altar. Many of the people who make use of the center are surviving internees who lost their homes and family businesses to redevelopment.

Today, neighborhood activists and merchants and city officials are working to secure the neighborhood’s future while honoring the spirit of its past. In 1999, a new Fillmore Jazz Preservation District welcomed an annual jazz festival and the Rasselas music club and dotted the area with monuments to early jazz greats who once played the neighborhood. Last year, the Kintetsu mall was acquired by 3d Investments of Beverly Hills, a corporation owned by three first-generation Jewish-Persian-American brothers, who have promised to maintain the area’s uniquely Japanese-American identity. And in the fall, San Francisco will celebrate the opening of the Fillmore Heritage Center, a $68 million development at Fillmore and Eddy streets planned to include condominiums, a new Yoshi’s music club, a jazz museum, a restaurant, and a parking garage.

Despite a century of upheaval and transition, the Fillmore lives on.

BLACK AMERICANS IN THE 1940S

BY MARGOT MELCON

During the early 1940s, the Fillmore exploded, because the war industry started. Kaiser established his shipyards, and then you had all the different munitions plants on both sides of the bay. These industries started hiring black people from the South, and naturally they came where we were. They all lived in the Western Addition. And that’s when the black business community in the Fillmore exploded. They brought their own restaurants, their own funeral services, their own nightclubs. People were war workers. They worked around the clock, so you had people on the street around the clock with money in their pockets and wanting to socialize. People would go out, the ladies would be dressed, and they’d ride public transportation. You had streetcars that went everywhere and all night.

—Earl Watkins, quoted in Harlem of the West. Watkins was born in the Fillmore district in 1920 in a rooming house on Sutter Street.

The Fillmore, when we came here, was open to everybody. Downtown, there were some problems. You were never told you couldn’t go—you just got snubbed. You’d get an uncomfortable feeling. I could see what my parents had gone through in Texas. There wasn’t any great big change when we moved here. It was just more subtle. You’d get a “no” with a smile, instead of with a growl. I found that bitterness doesn’t help you. You still have to live your life.

—Frank Jackson, quoted in Harlem of the West. Frank Jackson moved with his parents to the Fillmore district from Cleburne, Texas, in 1942.

In 1948, America was still living under the 1896 Supreme Court decision of Plessy v. Ferguson, which established a doctrine of “separate but equal” segregation in public spaces. Lynching was still common practice as a means of intimidating African Americans, especially in the Deep South. There had been a recent shift for the majority of black Americans from working in agriculture or domestic service to working in the manufacturing and service industries.
National organizations were the principal means of advocacy for civil rights. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (founded in 1909) and the National Urban League (founded in 1911) were both well established by the 1940s. The NUL focused its resources on practical, everyday matters, such as educational and employment conditions and opportunities, and health, sanitation, and housing problems. The NAACP was more concerned with broad social objectives, openly calling for the long-range goal of complete equality, concentrating on civil and political rights. In 1941, the Legal Defense Fund, the legislative arm of the NAACP, broke off to become its own organization. Organized labor provided a means for black Americans to come together in a common cause while providing a training ground for black leaders. Many traditionally all-black unions came under the protection of the AFL-CIO in the late 1940s.

Labor leader A. Philip Randolph organized a march on Washington, D.C., by hundreds of thousands of African Americans in 1941 to protest job discrimination in defense industries and the military. To avert this protest, President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, reaffirming the “policy of full participation in the defense program by all persons, regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin.” Roosevelt agreed to a Fair Employment Practices Committee to investigate allegations of discriminatory employment practices. Although the FEPC had no real power, Randolph’s highly visible advocacy of large-scale, direct-action protest was a sign of more aggressive tactics to come.

Civil rights leaders adopted the “Double v” (for “Double Victory”) slogan as their rallying cry during World War II. Demanding victory against fascism abroad as well as discrimination at home, they urged African-American citizens to support the war effort and to fight for equal treatment and opportunity for black Americans everywhere. Although segregation was their main target,
their campaign was directed against all forms of discrimination, especially in the armed forces. They flooded the services with appeals for redress of black grievances and levied similar demands on the White House, Congress, and the courts.

Black soldiers serving abroad in World War II witnessed a less oppressive environment of race relations than many of them had known living in the American South. Many returned home determined to fight the racism imbedded in the country they had just fought to defend. After the war, civil rights advocates welcomed further signs of liberal change. President Harry S. Truman, waging a Cold War against Communism, recognized that racism at home contradicted American claims to the right to lead the “free world” against oppression. Hoping to woo black votes in the 1948 election, Truman ordered the desegregation of the armed forces and called for federal laws to advance civil rights.

When the war began in Europe in 1937, there were only about fifty thousand African-American enlisted men and fewer than a dozen African-American officers in the regular army. Before the war ended in 1945, more than a million African-American men and about four thousand African-American women had served in the armed forces. Nearly half served abroad, most in Europe and North Africa, but thousands also served in the Pacific. They served in all branches of the military during the war.

During the war years a number of forces combined to bring greater industrial and occupational opportunities than African Americans had previously experienced. Black advocacy and the necessities of war forced the federal government to order the full utilization of all available manpower and an end to discrimination in employment. While such action brought about some economic gains for African Americans, the greatest force for change was the general expansion of industry and the shortage of labor as more men and women entered the armed forces. These manpower shortages gradually forced white employers and workers to dismiss their prejudices, if only temporarily, and accept black employees.

Without any encouragement from government or other agencies, huge numbers of African Americans moved to areas of the country that were home to the growing defense industries. The influx of these newcomers, most of them from the South, into areas in the North and West had an effect that could only be described as problematic. State and federal agencies, still attempting to cope with social problems born out of the Depression, were incapable of dealing with the influx of population into urban environments.

Between 1940 and 1944, more than 500,000 people moved to the Bay Area; more than 30,000 of them were African American. The white population of San Francisco increased by 28.1 percent between 1940 and 1946, and the African-American population grew by an enormous 560 percent, from 4,846 to 32,001. San Francisco was said to have no “negro problem” prior to 1941, largely because until then the number of African Americans had
been small. The situation changed when thousands of African Americans moved west seeking improved economic situations. Of 152 recently relocated black families interviewed in San Francisco, the majority had come to seek better employment, to work in war industries, and to earn more money.

The most obvious and pressing problem was where to house the newcomers. The Depression ended a boom in the building industry and construction was further curtailed during the 1940s, as all resources were concentrated on the war efforts. The African-American population newly settled in urban environments concentrated in the poorer areas for a variety of reasons. New arrivals in a city normally sought the security and help of friends and relatives already established. Once settled, their low economic status and the prejudice of whites prevented any movement out of the ghettos. Real estate agents refused to sell to blacks, banks refused to loan them money, and restrictions on property deeds often forbade the sale of buildings to minorities.

Restrictive covenants in both Los Angeles and San Francisco forced African Americans into areas formerly occupied by Japanese. In San Francisco, this meant 10,000 people were confined to a district previously inhabited by fewer than 5,000, and where 55 percent of the homes were rated substandard. War housing programs were completely inadequate: the number of defense homes occupied by African Americans in San Francisco was 4,784, although more than 20,000 immigrants had entered the city.

Overcrowding in low-income units and racial conflict in poor urban areas over housing, employment, and recreational facilities became serious issues overnight. The average immigrant family of five in San Francisco shared 3.3 rooms. For some, conditions were even worse.

In the postwar years, many of the economic and social gains made by African Americans during the war began to backslide. Without the war driving the domestic economy, and with a large number of soldiers returning home expecting to find work, black Americans were once again the last to be hired and the first to be fired. In the final years of the ’40s, unemployment among African Americans was on the rise. The abrupt urbanization of the 1940s intensified inadequacies in housing, health, and education for many black Americans; progress made by civil rights organizations, the growing number of black voters, and court rulings and legislation on desegregation, however, paved the way for the civil rights movements of the 1950s and ’60s.

Text from Harlem of the West © 2006 by Elizabeth Pepin. Used with permission of Chronicle Books LLC, San Francisco.
MARCH 26, 1790. The U.S. Congress decrees that “any alien, being a free white person who shall have resided within the limits and under the jurisdiction of the United States for a term of two years, may be admitted to become a citizen thereof.” The phrase “free white person” remains intact until 1873, when “persons of African nativity or descent” is added. This act would be used to deny citizenship to Japanese and other Asian immigrants until the mid-20th century.

FEBRUARY 8, 1885. The City of Tokio arrives in Honolulu carrying the first 944 official emigrants from Japan to Hawaii; they are contract laborers.

FEBRUARY 23, 1905. The San Francisco Chronicle front page headline reads: “The Japanese Invasion: The Problem of the Hour.” This launches an unrelenting string of editorials against the Japanese which serve to kick the anti-Japanese movement into high gear.

MAY 14, 1905. The Asiatic Exclusion League is formed in San Francisco, marking the official beginning of the anti-Japanese movement.

MAY 19, 1913. California Governor Hiram Johnson signs the 1913 Alien Land Law to become effective on August 10, prohibiting “aliens ineligible to citizenship” from owning land.

NOVEMBER 13, 1922. The U.S. Supreme Court rules on the Ozawa case, definitively prohibiting Issei from becoming naturalized citizens on the basis of race. This ban will last until 1952.

MAY 26, 1924. Calvin Coolidge signs the 1924 immigration bill into law, effectively ending Japanese immigration to the United States.

NOVEMBER 12, 1941. Fifteen Japanese-American businessmen and community leaders in Los Angeles’ Little Tokyo are picked up in an FBI raid. Records and membership lists for such organizations as the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and the Central Japanese Association are seized. The 15 would cooperate with authorities, while a spokesman for the Central Japanese Association states: “We teach the fundamental principles of America and the high ideals of American democracy. We want to live here in peace and harmony. Our people are 100 percent loyal to America.”

DECEMBER 7, 1941. Imperial Japanese forces attack Pearl Harbor, crippling the U.S. Pacific Fleet and taking more than 2,400 American lives. Fearing sabotage plots and insid-
ious fifth-column (enemy-sympathizer) support for Japan, within 48 hours the FBI arrests without cause 1,291 Issei (native-born Japanese) classified as “dangerous enemy aliens” based solely on their profession or community affiliations: newspapermen, commercial fishermen, martial arts instructors, Buddhist priests, Japanese language school instructors, successful businessmen, and community leaders. Held without charge and tried by three-member civilian panels without right of personal counsel or the right to object to the government’s evidence, some are “released” to join their families in relocation camps, while others are held for the duration of the war in Justice Department camps run like prisoner of war camps under the Geneva Conventions. Some are never seen again by their families. Issei bank accounts are frozen.

**February 19, 1942.** President Roosevelt issues Executive Order 9066, authorizing military authorities to exclude “any and all persons” from any area of the country as necessary for national defense.

**March 2, 1942.** General John L. DeWitt issues proclamations designating the western portion of California, Oregon, and Washington and part of Arizona as exclusion zones.

**March 27, 1942.** Gen. DeWitt makes internment and relocation mandatory. Notices are posted on public buildings, telephone poles, and lampposts ordering anyone of Japanese ancestry, “aliens and nonaliens alike,” to report for evacuation from exclusion zones. Given a few days to two weeks (in some areas as little as 24 hours) to store, sell, or give away their homes, businesses, and other possessions, they are allowed to take with them only what they can carry. They are bussed to temporary quarters in “assembly centers,” where they will remain for four to six months while permanent camps are constructed.

**April 6, 1942.** Evacuation of San Francisco Japanese begins. War Relocation Authority (wra) photographer Dorothea Lange documents the process.
**April 27, 1942.** An assembly center opens at the Tanforan racetrack near San Francisco; 8,000 people will be housed there in horse stalls and tar-papered barracks.

**April 11, 1943.** James Hatsuki Wakasa, a 63-year-old chef, is shot to death by a sentry at Heart Mountain internment camp while allegedly trying to escape through a fence. It is later determined that Wakasa had been inside the fence and facing the sentry when shot. The sentry would stand a general court-martial on April 28 at Fort Douglas, Utah, and be found “not guilty.”

**May 13, 1942.** Forty-five year old Ichiro Shimoda, a Los Angeles gardener, is shot to death by guards while trying to escape from Fort Still (Oklahoma) enemy alien internment camp. The victim was seriously mentally ill, having tried suicide twice since being picked up on December 7. He is shot despite the guards’ knowledge of his mental state.

**May 20, 1942.** The last Japanese are evacuated from San Francisco.

**June 1942.** After the defeat of the Japanese fleet in the Battle of Midway (June 3–6), U.S. Naval Intelligence reports to Washington that there is no longer a threat of a West Coast invasion. Relocation nevertheless continues.

**July 27, 1942.** Two *Issei*—Brawley, California, farmer Toshiro Kobata and San Pedro fisherman Hirota Isomura—are shot to death by camp guards at the Lourdsburg, New Mexico, enemy alien internment camp. The men had allegedly been trying to escape. It would later be reported, however, that upon their arrival to the camp, the men had been too ill to walk from the train station to the camp gate.

**August 1942.** More than 110,000 Japanese Americans, representing 90 percent of the entire Japanese-American population in the United States, are by now imprisoned in ten camps located either in desert regions of the American West or forested swamps of the South. (Most San Franciscans are sent to the Topaz camp in Utah.) More than half of the internees are children; the median age in the camps is 17.

Internees are provided a cot, a sack, and hay to stuff it with for bedding; daily food allowance is 45¢. Shelter is...
minimal; privacy is nonexistent; mail is censored; belongings are searched. Temperatures in the eight desert camps reach more than 120 degrees during the day. To create a semblance of ordinary life, internees establish schools, sports teams, swing bands, orchestras, theater groups, and other community organizations.

**October 20, 1942.** President Roosevelt calls the relocation centers “concentration camps” at a press conference. The War Relocation Authority (WRA) has consistently denied that the term “concentration camps” accurately describes the centers.

**February 1, 1943.** The War Department activates the all-**Nisei** (second-generation Japanese-American) 442nd Regimental Combat Team.

**February 10, 1943.** The WRA distributes a questionnaire to internees. Questions 27 and 28, requiring respondents to declare their loyalty to the United States and forswear allegiance to the Japanese emperor, prove to be deeply divisive. Outraged that they are being asked such questions while denied their rights as citizens, many answer “no” to both. They are labeled “No-Nos” and branded as disloyal by the WRA, as well as by many Japanese-American friends and family members. They are sent to the camp in Tule Lake, California, where they are segregated to await “repatriation” to Japan.

**March 20, 1944.** Forty-three Japanese American soldiers are arrested for refusing to participate in combat training at Fort McClellan, Alabama. Eventually, 106 are arrested for their refusal, undertaken to protest the treatment of their families in U.S. concentration camps. Twenty-one are convicted and serve prison time before being paroled in 1946. The records of 11 are cleared by the Army Board of Corrections of Military Records in 1983. (The other 10 do not apply for clearance.)

**May 24, 1944.** Shoichi James Okamoto is shot to death at Tule Lake by a guard after stopping a construction truck at the main gate for permission to pass. Private Bernard Goe, the guard, would be acquitted after being fined a dollar for “unauthorized use of government property”—a bullet.
January 14, 1944. Nisei eligibility for the draft is restored.

December 17, 1944. President Roosevelt lifts the ban excluding Japanese Americans from the West Coast and announces that all relocation centers will be closed within a year. Approximately 90,000 internees return to the West Coast.

January 8, 1945. The packing shed of the Doi family is burned and dynamited and shots are fired into their home. The family was the first to return to California from Amache and the first to return to Placer County, having arrived three days earlier. Although several men are arrested and confess to the acts, all will be acquitted. Some 30 similar incidents will greet other Japanese Americans returning to the West Coast between January and June.

May 7, 1945. The surrender of Germany ends the war in Europe.

August 6, 1945. The atomic bomb is dropped on Hiroshima. Three days later, a second bomb is dropped on Nagasaki.

July 2, 1948. President Truman signs the Japanese American Evacuation Claims Act, a measure to compensate Japanese Americans for certain economic losses attributable to their forced evacuation.

August 14, 1946. The war ends.

1981. The Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians holds a series of public hearings as part of its investigation of Japanese-American incarceration during World War II. A stream of witnesses testifies, many of them speaking out for the first time, of the hardships and psychological trauma they suffered in the camps. The resulting report, *Personal Justice Denied*, condemns the internment as unjustified by military necessity.

1988. Congress passes the Civil Liberties Act, providing a presidential apology and symbolic payment of $20,000 to persons of Japanese ancestry whose civil rights were violated by the federal government during World War II.

The story of Japanese-American soldiers during World War II, like most, has two sides. On the one hand, the men of the 100th Infantry “Remember Pearl Harbor” Battalion and the “Go for Broke” 442nd Regimental Combat Team (rct) were famously brave and well trained. These troops were vital to the Allied victory in Europe. To this day, the 442nd/100th is still the most decorated unit of its size in U.S. military history, with more than 18,000 individual decorations, including 9,486 Purple Hearts and 5,200 Bronze Stars. The rct earned five Presidential Citations in 20 days of Rhineland fighting alone, the only military unit ever to claim that achievement.

Sustaining losses amounting to a conservatively calculated official casualty rate of 93 percent of its 3,000 men (which represents the total of soldiers killed in action, wounded in action, and missing in action per number of personnel), the 442nd gained a reputation as the toughest fighting unit in the army. The subject of a popular 1951 Hollywood film, Go for Broke, starring Van Johnson (the title was lifted from the unit’s motto), they were nicknamed “Little Iron Men” and the “Purple Heart Battalion.” Nor were the accomplishments of the 100th/442nd in Europe the only Japanese-American triumphs of the war. In addition, in the opinion of Major General Charles Willoughby, General MacArthur’s intelligence chief, the 6,000 Nisei who served as spies and translators with the Military Intelligence Service (mis) in Asia and in the Pacific Theater “shortened the war in the Pacific by two years” and saved countless thousands of lives.

From the perspective of its achievements, then, the story of American Nisei (second-generation Japanese-American) involvement in the war effort is one of almost unprecedented success. On the other hand, racist suspicions and downright mistreatment colored almost every aspect of the Nisei soldiers’ experience, from induction to discharge and beyond.

VOLUNTEERING AND TRAINING: EXCELLENCE IN THE FACE OF RACISM

The story of the Nisei soldiers takes place against the sinister background of what may be the most egregious official U.S. civil rights violation of the 20th century, the Japanese-American internment. The internment was, however, neither the first nor the only outrage the U.S. government perpetrated on Japanese Americans, including loyal Nisei soldiers.

Most of the volunteers came from the territory of Hawaii, where, unlike the mainland United States, internment was totally impractical, as roughly 38 of the territory’s popula-
tion was of Japanese ancestry and critical to the continued functioning of the economy. Instead, the military instated an ugly and invasive regime of martial law. All standing Nisei members of the Hawaiian Territorial Guard, most of whom were members of the University of Hawaii's ROTC, were summarily discharged. Furthermore, on the institution of draft following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, all Japanese Americans in Hawaii, as well as on the mainland, regardless of citizenship, were classified as 4C, enemy aliens. In a gesture of loyalty that may seem incomprehensible to many of us today, the Hawaiian ex-Guardsmen formed the Varsity Victory Volunteers, a group of unpaid young men who “did everything the Army wanted them to do”—mostly cleaning, clearing, and construction. On the evidence of the vvv’s selfless performance of menial tasks, and on the insistence of local politicians, General Marshall approved the transportation of Hawaiian volunteers to the mainland for training at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, as the 100th Infantry Battalion, an exclusively Japanese-American unit.

Meanwhile, however, the Army’s misgivings as to their loyalty had hardly receded, and the volunteers were consistently treated with derision and suspicion. One veteran recalls in Chester Tanaka’s book *Go for Broke*:

> Our job was to clean out the stables. As we started to clean out the area, we received orders to drop everything and assemble on the first floor of one of the barracks. I looked out of the window and there was a 30-caliber machine gun pointing at the building we were in. Shortly thereafter President Roosevelt’s car drove by. Here we were U.S. soldiers, in uniform, citizens, but they still didn’t trust us.

Other detachments of the trainees were chosen for special assignments. During 1942 and 1943, those with superior Japanese language skills were chosen for intelligence training for the M15, while some of the rest were given more degrading jobs. In the most bizarre instance of this tendency, one detachment of the 100th was sent to a remote island to assist in dog training: Some high-ranking military personnel had had the idea that dogs could be trained to smell Japanese and to attack. As described by a veteran in *Go for Broke*, a white soldier would fire a gun, after which the Nisei volunteer would collapse, “dead,” with a piece of meat over his throat. Needless to say, the dogs refused to bite the Nisei, and the experiment failed. In addition to these injustices, the Nisei were spied on at all times. Many white officers who were assigned to them had the sole function of monitoring the troops’ loyalty and guarding against “dangerous” behavior.

Despite these trials, the 100th performed superbly in training and in maneuvers, and their exemplary comportment convinced the military and the president to open the draft
to all \textit{Nisei}. The interned West Coast \textit{Nisei} were issued the infamous loyalty questionnaire, questions 27 and 28 of which read:

- Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?
- Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces, and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power, or organization?

The decision to answer yes to these questions and to volunteer carried a much greater charge for the mainland \textit{Nisei} than for their Hawaiian counterparts, and this choice was as pressing as it was complicated. To begin with, although many of them objected to the pointed tenor of questions 27 and 28, answering them affirmatively would buy them a ticket out of the internment camps. Nonetheless, doing so would put them in a position to die for the u.s. government even while it held their families captive. Those who answered “no” to both questions became known as “No-No Boys.”

It is important to remember that the sentiments of No-No Boys like Chet in \textit{After the War} did not simply represent either laziness, as Mr. Goto suggests, or an anarchical sense of youthful rebellion. While most Japanese-American leaders, such as \textit{After the War’s} Mr. Goto, remained devoted to the United States and would follow the triumphs of the unit in Europe and publicly embrace the sacrifices of the 442nd as an emblem for the community’s “Americanism” (President Roosevelt’s term), some Japanese Americans did not. Many \textit{Issei} and, especially, \textit{Kibei} (Japanese-educated \textit{Nisei}), had retained strong ties with Japan until the war. Some \textit{Issei}, like the mother of the title character in John Okada’s novel \textit{No-No Boy}, even expressly forbade their sons to answer “yes-yes” on questions 27 and 28. On the other hand, some of the 25 percent of draft-eligible \textit{Nisei} like Chet who answered “no-no” doubtless did so out of disgust at the treatment they had received at the hands of the government they were called to defend. Whatever the reasons, nearly 2,900 Hawaiians and only 800 or so West Coast \textit{Nisei} initially ended up in the original 442nd rct. The first \textit{Nisei} troops were shipped out in August 1943.

\section*{Assessing the Combat Record}

There are two valid ways of assessing the 442nd rct’s combat performance and its perception. On the one hand, it couldn’t escape anyone’s notice, including that of military top brass and of the president himself, that the \textit{Nisei} fought uncommonly well: they were among the first units in combat in Europe, they were unexpectedly effective in battle, and
no one had cause to question their loyalty in combat. Most notably, they were key factors in the success of the Naples-Foggia campaign, suffering very heavy losses at Cassino and Anzio, the Southern France campaign, and the Northern Appenines. If one looks beyond their extraordinary performance, however, and examines their record with a critical eye, one discovers unsettling decisions on the part of the High Command. For example, the 442nd was denied the opportunities for glory accorded white units. One instance is to be found in the fact that they were halted outside of Rome when they were in a position to take the city—ostensibly to save that honor for another unit of different ancestry. Furthermore, they were given some especially dangerous assignments, the most famous of which was their ludicrous (and disastrously successful) mission to rescue the so-called “Lost Battalion” at Biffontaine. In this episode, the 442nd received orders in late October 1944 to rescue the 1st Battalion of the 141st Infantry, which had been surrounded for two days in the Vosges Mountains of Alsace-Lorraine by German troops. In a battle that raged for five days, the Nisei lost 800 men in the course of rescuing the 141st’s 211 Texans.

AFTER THE WAR
The Nisei soldiers returned to the West Coast in 1945 and 1946 to find that the military accomplishments of the 100th/442nd—already known far and wide as the “Purple Heart Battalion”—hadn’t immediately added up to improved conditions for the Japanese-American community. As Senator Daniel Inouye describes in his autobiography, Journey to Washington, in Hawaii, the men of the 442nd were universally hailed as heroes, and their return marked the beginning of an immediate downturn in anti-Asian sentiment. On the mainland, however, because of the bitter legacy of internment on both sides of the fence, the situation was somewhat more complicated. Strange though it sounds, we must recall that while Nisei soldiers fought and bled in the snow and mud of Cassino and Biffontaine, their families still languished in the camps. Furthermore, as the characters in After the War poignantly demonstrate, anti-Japanese attitudes remained strong in San Francisco and elsewhere. “Japs not allowed” signs persisted in many storefronts, and that wasn’t the worst of it. A section from Go for Broke details a disturbing litany of racist acts perpetrated on Nisei veterans and their families upon their return to the States:

Night riders warned Mary Masuda—the sister of S/Sgt. Kazuo Masuda, who had earned a Distinguished Service Cross posthumously—not to return to her home. A barber in a small town just outside San Francisco refused to give a haircut to Capt. [now Sen.] Daniel Inouye. . . . PFC Wilson Makabe [who had lost his right leg in combat] called his brother from the hospital to learn that
their home had mysteriously burned to the ground when they attempted to return. PFC Richard Naito, wounded and disabled, applied for membership in the local Veterans of Foreign Wars (vfw) post, only to be turned town and told to “go join his own.”

Against this disgraceful background, the suspicions expressed by Lillian in *After the War* about white America, and her belief that internment—or worse—“can happen again” seem anything but paranoid, and Chet’s story about the demeaning treatment meted out to him and Earl at the department store seems insidiously commonplace.

Homecoming presented other problems for Nisei veterans. For instance, due to pre-existing racist immigration and naturalization laws, many of the Issei parents of the soldiers had been barred from citizenship, and hence from owning property before the war. Consequently, the internment effectively nullified any measure of financial stability the Japanese-American community had been able to eke out before Pearl Harbor. As *After the War* tellingly illustrates, while white America embarked on a period of unprecedented economic and technological boom, the returning West Coast Nisei and their disenfranchised families came home to a state of affairs verging on economic disaster.

The competing legacies of racism and uncommon valor continue to haunt the story of the 100th/442nd. A strange coda for the Nisei soldiers was sounded in 2000, when President William Clinton finally awarded 22 (mostly posthumous) Medals of Honor to members of the 442nd. As historians James C. McNaughton, Kristen E. Edwards, and Jay M. Price note in their essay, “Incontestable Proof Will Be Exacted: Historians, Asian Americans, and the Medal of Honor”: “The 442nd Regimental Combat Team was celebrated as one of the most decorated units in American military history, but only one of its members received the Medal of Honor”—until a full 55 years after the fact.
JAZZ IN AMERICA

BY LALEY LIPPARD

SOME BACKGROUND
Jazz has been cited as America’s first truly original contribution to the world art community. From the beat of ragtime syncopation and driving brass bands to soaring gospel choirs mixed with field hollers and the deep down growl of the blues, jazz’s many roots are celebrated almost everywhere in the United States. Jazz blends elements of African music, work songs, hymns, dances, marches, and Creole music.

The city of New Orleans features prominently in the early development of jazz. A port city with doors to the spicy sounds of the Caribbean and Mexico and a large, well-established African-American population, the Crescent City was ripe for the development of new music at the turn of the century. Brass bands marched in numerous parades and played to comfort families during funerals. One of the first great cornetists, Joe “King” Oliver, and his leading student and future star, Louis Armstrong, hailed from New Orleans, along with other influential musicians, including Jelly Roll Morton.

Chicago became the focal point for jazz in the early 1920s when New Orleans musicians found their way north after clubs in the Storyville area of New Orleans were closed. Famous musicians who received acclaim for their work in Chicago, in addition to Armstrong and Oliver, were Earl Hines and Johnny Dodds. So it’s not surprising that After the War’s Chet Monkawa finds his way to the City of Big Shoulders. Armstrong and clarinet master Benny Goodman eventually made their way to New York, helping to create a critical mass and making that city the jazz capital of the world. New York truly became the center of performing as well as recording, ushering in such legendary clubs as Minton’s, the Cotton Club, and the Village Vanguard and such performance arenas as Carnegie Hall.

JAZZ AND RACE
The explosive individuality of the jazz musicians and the music itself were greatly affected when America suddenly found itself at war on December 7, 1941. Young people became fascinated with jazz. It was a musical, cultural, and even ideological expression that was far removed from the “Hit Parade” music commonly played on mainstream radio. Jazz music and dance were sensual, expressive, joyous, and raucous. Jazz musicians openly defied segregation by mixing on and off the stage, and jazz enthusiasts also mixed on and off the
dance floor. In “Things to Come: Swing Bands, Bebop, and the Rise of a Post War Jazz Scene,” Lewis Ehrenberg writes:

Unlike the homogeneous, hierarchical groups of the sweet era, the swing bands celebrated the fact that the jazz world was one of the most egalitarian and pluralistic realms in American life. . . . Swing was profoundly cosmopolitan, including blacks, Jews, Italians, Poles, Irish, and Protestants as leaders, players, and singers. It had wealthy Charlie Barnett, who rejected his background to lead the exciting jazz life, and Artie Shaw, the former Arthur Arshawsky, who sought in big-band success an American alternative to his parents’ Jewish identity. . . . The big swing bands fostered what Frank Sinatra called “collaboration, brotherhood, and sharing rough times.” In this context, swing offered a new model of social democracy and group life and in turn attracted players of mixed backgrounds and varied social groupings. . . . On all fronts, the war magnified awareness among young blacks of their secondary racial and economic status in the new national culture symbolized by Glenn Miller’s band. To some, the war ended possibilities of social reform of American life. Fighting a racist foe in a segregated army pointed out the hypocrisy of national ideals of unity. . . . [The new music] was a protest against the failed expectations of the past, particularly those embodied in swing. . . . [Bop] is a profound criticism of the failure of swing’s ecstatic hopes for a modern America rooted in pluralism and individualism.

More than any other music before its time, jazz became a battleground and a symbol for racial equality. More than a decade before major league baseball admitted its first black player, Benny Goodman formed a mixed-race trio with pianist Teddy Wilson and later, with the addition of vibraphonist Lionel Hampton, made jazz a vanguard in the civil rights movement.

Other important ways jazz championed race: The first racially mixed recording session was with New Orleans Rhythm Kings (nork) and Jelly Roll Morton in 1923. Billie Holiday’s signature song, “Strange Fruit,” a protest song Lewis Allen (Abel Meeropol) wrote about the ongoing and intransigent problem of lynching in the American South, became popular in 1938. The Committee of Racial Equality, later renamed Congress of Racial Equality, was founded in 1942, the same year Eddie Condon’s integrated band appeared on CBS television. In 1947, Ella Fitzgerald and Dizzie Gillespie performed at a sold-out concert at Carnegie Hall, and Jackie Robinson became the first African American in major league baseball.
In *Writing Jazz*, David Meltzer quotes Duke Ellington:

Well, when the war came along, a few years back, people wondered whether music was going to be one of the casualties. Would it have to take a back seat for a while? Would we have to sacrifice it at a time when bombs and bullets had an a-i priority over Boogie-Woogie and Bach? I think these last few years have proved that music doesn't kick up its heels and call it quits under crisis. Music is staying by popular request of the fighting men and the folks they left behind. And that goes for all music. . . . The music of my race is something more than the “American idiom.” It is the result of our transplantation to American soil, and was our reaction in the plantation days to the tyranny we endured. What we could not say openly we expressed in music, and what we know as “jazz” is something more than just dance music. When we dance it is not a mere diversion or social accomplishment. It expresses our personality, and right down in us, our souls react to the elemental but eternal rhythm, and the dance is timeless.

**AFTER WORLD WAR II**

Post–World War II jazz contrasted with the big bands of swing and had parallels with abstract expressionist painters and the Beat writers. The popularity of jazz, and the swing music style, waned after World War II. However, big bands like those of Duke Ellington, Woody Herman, Count Basie, and others upheld the tradition. Postwar jazz was not dance music and was primarily played by smaller ensembles. This new style of jazz was called “bebop,” the music Chet Monkawa refers to in *After the War* as having “less structure, more solo work” and as “tougher, meaner.” Bebop was more harmonically challenging, maintained a high level of virtuosity, and pushed the established language to its extremes.

The language of jazz changed drastically with the emergence of bebop in the mid 1940s. A gutsy group of musicians that included Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Max Roach, Kenny Clarke, Bud Powell, and Thelonious Monk invented bebop in an outright attempt to create something new and challenging, and to express their anger and frustration with racial conflict in America. Ehrenberg comments in “Things to Come”: “[The] rise of bop music as the major jazz innovation of the era was as much a change in style as it represented a significant perceptual shift in the world. Initially, this new musical form found expression after the war as the entire band world plunged into musical and social turmoil.”
JAZZ IN THE JAPANESE-AMERICAN INTERNMENT CAMPS

It is not well known that Issei and Nisei Japanese immigrants played in swing music bands while in the internment camps. Amid the desolation of camp life, Japanese Americans found hope in their own musical expression. Dance bands quickly sprouted in the psychologically and physically depressed conditions that prevailed in the camps.

“Japanese Americans were participants in the jazz tradition,” says Anthony Brown, drummer, musicologist, and director of the San Francisco–based jazz band known as the Asian American Orchestra, as well as the composer for A.C.T.’s *After the War*. “Some of the Japanese internment camp players went on to become professional musicians, such as Paul Higaki, who later played trombone with Lionel Hampton’s orchestra. They kept bands alive in the Japanese-American community and nurtured and developed what we now call Asian-American jazz.” Brown also says, “What distinguishes [Asian-American jazz] from others is that it incorporates not only instrumentation from Asia, but also conceptual approaches to making music. So when you bring in the music rather than just bringing in the melodies, you bring in also concepts of how to improvise and how to structure the music.”

In the course of his research for *Reminiscing in Swingtime: Japanese Americans in American Popular Music, 1925–60*, author and jazz musician George Yoshida discovered that big bands existed in the Japanese-American community as early as the mid-1920s. In his book, Yoshida remembers several prominent wartime Japanese-American jazz musicians:

**James Araki** was a self-taught instrumentalist who could play the trumpet, saxophone, clarinet, piano, and guitar. Called by his contemporaries *kamisama* (god) and “the great alto sax player who first introduced bepbop to Japan,” Araki was one of many Nisei servicemen who served in the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section of General Headquarters in postwar Tokyo. He was the bandleader of The Eager Beavers, a 12-piece ensemble at a language school that was first established in San Francisco’s Presidio. In 1955 he joined Lionel Hampton’s sax section with his alto in a single recording session.

**Paul Higaki** was born in San Francisco on July 28, 1924. At John Swett Junior High School, he took up the trombone and continued to play for the rest of life. In 1942, Higaki was interned with his family in the Merced assembly center, where he organized his first dance band, The Stardusters. He gathered together five saxophone players, two trumpeters, two female violin players, a female pianist, and a female drummer. At the Amache Detention Camp in Colorado, where all the inhabitants of Merced were incarcerated, he again directed a dance band.

Higaki volunteered for military service, but was given medical discharge just five months after enlisting. In 1944, then known professionally as Paul “Murphy” Lee, Higaki became a member of the ten-piece Lee Williams Orchestra, playing to cities in the
Midwest. After a few more collaborations, he returned in 1947 to San Francisco, where he continued to play music. One of his earliest bands included three white musicians, three black musicians, and himself.

George Yoshida was born in Seattle, Washington, and moved in 1936 to Los Angeles, where he worked in a grocery store, attended a local high school, and enrolled in Los Angeles City College. He loved Big Band music and especially Duke Ellington. He was the founder of the San Francisco–based J-Town Jazz Ensemble, a swing band, and played saxophone in an Arizona Japanese internment camp band known as The Music Makers. After work, he and his friends played dance music by Benny Goodman, Glen Miller, and Duke Ellington. He states in Reminiscing in Swingtime: “[F]rivolous as it may seem, dance bands proliferated for awhile during the wartime incarceration of Japanese Americans. It was a matter of survival and a subconscious affirmation of the self—a way to express through music, 'I am an American!'

Detainees at other camps in California also formed swing bands, including The Downbeats and The Starlighters (Tule Lake Center), The Jive Bombers (Manzanar Detention Camp), The Pomonans (Pomona Assembly Center), The Tanforan Tooters (Tanforan Assembly Center), and The D-Elevens. A band in the Heart Mountain, Wyoming, camp was invited several times by outside groups to entertain at dances and benefits for war bonds. One band played at a local high school prom. The Jive Bombers, their speakers facing the guard post at another camp, occasionally played the popular tune “Don’t Fence Me In.”

“The music of resourceful, enthusiastic Nisei musicians provided a reassuring cushion for many young internees against complete spiritual annihilation,” writes Yoshida. “[They were a] thin ray of hope in the darkness of a frightening, unpredictable future.”

Other Jazz Musicians Mentioned in After the War

Benny Goodman (1909–86) was born Ben Guttmann in Chicago, the ninth child of a poor Jewish family. Known as “King of Swing,” “Patriarch of the Clarinet,” “The Professor,” and “Swing’s Senior Statesman,” he was one of the most important performers of popular music in the 20th century. Goodman is responsible for a significant step in racial integration in America. In the early 1930s, black and white jazz musicians could not play together in most clubs or concerts. In the southern states, the Jim Crow laws enforced racial segregation. Goodman broke with tradition by hiring African-American pianist Teddy Wilson to play with him and drummer Gene Krupa in the Benny Goodman Trio.

Trumpeter Ziggy Elman (1914–68) was born Harry Aaron Finkelman in Philadelphia and became associated with Benny Goodman when he joined the trio in 1936. The
Finkelman family settled in Atlantic City when Harry was four years old. He began playing for Jewish weddings and nightclubs at age 15 and soon adopted the name Ziggy Elman. He had success with a klezmer tune adapted for swing called “And the Angels Sing.” Arguably his longest-lasting musical legacy, the song was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame in 1987. After his work with Goodman, Elman joined Tommy Dorsey’s band; he also played as a member of the U.S. Air Force band during the war.

**Duke Ellington** (1899–1974) was born Edward Kennedy Ellington in Washington, D.C. A composer, pianist, and bandleader, he was one of the most influential figures in jazz, if not in all American music. Ellington was one of the 20th-century’s best-known African-American celebrities. He recorded for many American record companies and appeared in several films. Ellington and his orchestra toured the United States and Europe regularly before and after World War II. One of his most popular tunes was “It Don’t Mean a Thing If It Ain’t Got That Swing.”

**Lionel Hampton** (1908–2002) was born in Louisville, Kentucky. His father, Charles Hampton, a promising pianist and singer, was reported missing and later declared killed in World War I. Lionel and his mother, Gertrude, first moved to Birmingham, Alabama, to be with her family, then settled in Chicago. As a bandleader, he established the Lionel Hampton Orchestra, which became known around the world for its tremendous energy, dazzling showmanship, and first-class jazz musicianship. His hits included “Sunny Side of the Street,” “Central Avenue Breakdown,” his signature tune “Flying Home,” and “Hamp’s Boogie-Woogie,” which all became top-of-the-chart bestsellers upon their release.

**Jimmy Dorsey** (1904–57) was born in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania. The older of the two Dorsey brothers, he was a child prodigy who began his musical career at the age of seven playing the slide trumpet and cornet with his father’s brass band at local parties. His father was a working-class man who wanted a better life for his children and made them study music diligently. In 1933, Jimmy and younger brother Tommy formed their famous Dorsey Brothers Orchestra, which included drummer Ray McKinley, trombonist Glenn Miller, and singer Bob Crosby. By 1935, continued feuding between the two brothers led to the breakup of the band. In 1938, Jimmy participated in some of the infamous Friday-afternoon jam sessions organized by Eddie Condon at the Park Lane Hotel, which included Pee Wee Russell, Sidney Bechet, Bobby Hackett, Willie “The Lion” Smith, Bud Freeman, Hot Lips Page, Bunny Berigan, and Red Allen.

**MISCELLANEOUS TIDBITS OF INFORMATION**

**Issei**: Japanese immigrants to America.

**Nisei**: Second-generation Japanese Americans; i.e., the children of the Issei.

**Kibei**: Nisei children who spent all or most of their primary or secondary school years in Japan.

**Manju**: Derived from a type of mochi (see below), there are many varieties of manju, but most have an outside shell made from flour, rice powder, and buckwheat surrounding an interior of anko, or red bean paste. The bean paste is made from azuki beans and sugar, which are boiled together and kneaded. There are several varieties of bean paste, including koshian, tsubuan, and tsubushian. Bean paste is used in most Japanese-style confectionery. (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manju_%28food%29.)

**Tsukemono**: Rarely is there a meal in Japan where tsukemono (pickles) are not served. The simplest and most basic meal is nothing more than a bowl of rice and umeboshi (pickled plum), but tsukemono are also served at the most sophisticated and complex feasts. Japanese pickles are not at all like the pickles found in western cooking. Tsukemono are prepared in a number of ways using many different types of foods, including fruit, vegetables, eggs, seeds, and even fish.

The varieties of tsukemono are endless, with literally thousands of types to choose from and hundreds of techniques for making them. Popular pickled vegetables include Chinese cabbage, daikon radish, carrots, bamboo, turnips, gobo (burdock root), ginger, Japanese cucumbers, and Japanese eggplant.

Tsukemono lend color, texture, and aroma to a meal; the earliest known tsukemono were called konomonos or “fragrant things.” Vegetable tsukemono are crisp and always fresh, with small amounts of several varieties usually served in individual petite dishes. All types of tsukemono are available commercially, but because it is inexpensive and easy to do, many people make pickles at home. (Source: http://www.nyfoodmuseum.org/_pasia.htm.)

**Sukkoth**: The Jewish harvest festival, Sukkoth begins on the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Tishrei, which usually falls during September or October. The celebration lasts eight days.

Sukkoth dates back to the 40 years during which the Jews wandered in the desert wilderness after the escape from Egypt en route to Canaan (now Israel). During their pilgrimage, they lived in open, temporary booths called sukkot (plural for suka). People also gath-
ered in sukko to share meals and worship; hence, Sukkoth is also called the Feast of the Tabernacles. In later years, during harvest time, farmers also lived in sukkot in open fields where they would take time from their labors to thank God for the crops. It was at this time that the holiday became associated with the harvest.

Today, many Jewish families continue the tradition of building sukkot and holding festivities inside them. The roof of a sukka is built with olive and other tree branches, which are decorated with fruits and flowers. The roof is loosely woven so that the sky can be seen through it; the walls are usually framed with wood (although today some celebrants use pipes made of metal or plastic or erect solid walls). Families usually eat their meals in the sukka during the eight days of the festival, and a ceremony is held each day to remember ancestors and to thank God for the harvest. Some families sleep in them, as well. (Sources: http://www.familyculture.com/holidays/Sukkoth; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukkot.)

**Shigin:** The Japanese art of reciting or singing poems written in the Chinese style of kanshi, shigin is sung to commemorate special occasions such as weddings, funerals, and New Year’s celebrations (shinenkai). There are five thousand different singing styles, or schools, of shigin, each style singing the same poems to a different melody. The poems express all facets of human life—love, the beauty of nature, happiness, grief, revenge, etc. Buddhist monks from China first introduced kanshi to Japan. Chinese poets recited kanshi using intonation and inflection on words to emphasize their meaning. It sounded very similar to Buddhist chanting. The Japanese form of the art first gained popularity in America during World War II when shigin groups were formed in the internment camps. Many of the groups formed in the Manzanar Relocation Center, for example, continued to study shigin after the war and are still active today. (Source: http://www.vjcc.com/inside_07-03.htm.)

**Boys’ Day (or Boys’ Festival):** The Japanese Boys’ Festival (tango no sekku) is celebrated on May 5. Families pray for the health and future success of their sons by hanging up carp streamers and displaying samurai dolls, both symbolizing strength, power, and success in life. (The Girls’ Festival is traditionally celebrated on March 3.) (Source: http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2282.html.)

**New Year:** New Year (shogatsu or oshogatsu) is the most important holiday in Japan. Most businesses shut down from January 1 to January 3, and families typically gather to spend the days together.

Years are traditionally viewed as completely separate, with each New Year providing a fresh start. Consequently, all duties are supposed to be completed by the end of the year, while bonenkai parties (“year-forgetting parties”) are held with the purpose of leaving the
old year’s worries and troubles behind. Homes and entrance gates are decorated with ornaments made of pine, bamboo, and plum trees, and clothes and houses are cleaned.

On New Year’s eve, *toshikoshi soba* (buckwheat noodles), symbolizing longevity, are served. January 1 is a very auspicious day, best started by viewing the new year’s first sunrise (*hatsu-hinode*), and traditionally believed to be representative for the whole year that has just commenced. Therefore, the day is supposed be full of joy and free of stress and anger, while everything should be clean and no work should be done.

It is a tradition to visit a shrine or temple during *shogatsu*. The most popular temples and shrines, such as Tokyo’s Meiji Shrine, attract several million people during the three days. Most impressive are such visits at the actual turn of the year, when large temple bells are rung at midnight.

Various kinds of *osechi ryori* (special New Year’s dishes) are served during *shogatsu*. They include *otoso* (sweetened rice wine) and *ozoni* (a soup with *mochi*).

A very popular custom is the sending of New Year’s cards, which are specially marked to be delivered on January 1. It is not uncommon for one person to send out several dozens of cards to friends, relatives, and co-workers. (Source: http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2064.html.)

**Pounding Mochi:** The *mochi* pound, or *mochi-tsuki*, is one of Japan’s most deeply rooted rituals. In both secular and religious circles, the annual *shogatsu mochi* pound signifies a fresh start for the new year. To make *mochi* the old-school way, steamed, young-grain rice is put into a mortar called an *usu* and pounded with a mallet, or *kine*, until glutinous, then formed into cakes. Because a traditional *mochi* pound is such a back-breaking endeavor, community members or family members take turns swinging the *kine*, bonding those who take part. These cakes will be made into *ko* (small) *mochi* for *ozoni* soup, or they will be made into *okasane mochi*, a tiered stack that is offered for health, wealth, and prosperity.

For *mochi* enthusiasts, there is nothing to compare with the lightly sweet taste and chewy-sticky texture that comes from freshly made *mochi*. *Mochi* fillings change with the seasons. In Japan, *mochi* is filled with not just red bean paste, but also anise, vegetable paste, green tea, rose flavors, and even cream cheese. (Source: http://honoluluweekly.com/cover/story-continued/2006/05/sticky-business/.)

**Hana-Matsuri Festivals:** *Hana-matsuri* (literally, “flower festival”) refers to the memorial service performed at temples throughout Japan to celebrate the birth of Buddha on April 8. It is formally called *kanbutsue*. On this day, small buildings decorated with flowers are made at temples, and a *tanjobutsu* (baby Buddha figurine) is placed inside each one. This figurine is sprinkled by worshippers using a ladle with *ama-cba*, which is a beverage
made by soaking tea leaves in hot water. Some people take this *ama-cha* home and drink it as holy water. Those who visit a shrine on Buddha’s birthday take an offering of fresh spring flowers (cherry blossoms). Men, women, and children put on kimonos and march through the streets to the shrine and sing Buddhist chants. The streets are decorated with white lanterns with black and red writing, and streamers made to look like cherry blossoms float through the air. (Source: http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/indepth/history/traditional_events/a70c_fes_hana.html.)

**OBON DANCING:** *Obon* is an annual Buddhist event for commemorating one’s ancestors. It is believed that each year during *obon* the ancestors’ spirits return to this world to visit their relatives. Traditionally, lanterns are hung in front of houses to guide the ancestors’ spirits, *obon* dances (*bon odori*) are performed, graves are visited, and food offerings are made at house altars and temples. At the end of *obon*, floating lanterns are put into rivers, lakes, and seas to guide the spirits back to their world. The customs followed vary from region to region.

*Obon* is celebrated from the 13th to the 15th day of the seventh month of the year, which is July according to the solar calendar. Since the seventh month of the year roughly coincides with August rather than July according to the formerly used lunar calendar, however, *obon* is still celebrated in mid August in many regions of Japan, while it is celebrated in mid July in others. (Source: http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2286.html.)

**BUSTER CRABBE:** A former athlete turned actor, Buster Crabbe won the 1932 Olympic 400-meter freestyle swimming title. He starred in more than 170 movies, including the title roles of the *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers* serials, as well as appearances in *Tarzan* films and a series of low-budget *Billy the Kid* westerns. He also appeared on television, authored fitness books, and owned a successful swimming pool company. Crabbe set 16 world records and was named to the International Swimming Hall of Fame. (Source: http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9002689/Buster-Crabbe.)

**THE SAN FRANCISCO SEALS AND THE DIMAGGIO BROTHERS:** The San Francisco Seals were a fabled minor league baseball club in the Pacific Coast League from 1903 through 1957. Seals Stadium was located at 16th Street and Bryant. Two of the DiMaggio brothers—Vince and Joe—played for the Seals. Joe joined the club in 1932; in 1936 he was acquired by the Yankees. Dom DiMaggio played for the Seals from 1937 through 1939, then moved to the majors, where he spent his career with the Boston Red Sox. Vince played for the Seals 1932–33, then was traded to the Hollywood Stars. He played for several minor and major league clubs.
**TELEVISION:** Using technology based on a scanning technique proposed by French engineer Maurice LeBlanc in 1880, the first true television success, the transmission of a live human face, was achieved by John Logie Baird in Britain in 1925. (The word “television” itself had been coined by a Frenchman, Constantin Perskyi, at the 1900 Paris Exhibition.) In 1927 the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) gave a public demonstration of the new technology, and by 1928 the General Electric Company (GE) had begun regular television broadcasts.

By 1948, when *After the War’s* Chester Monkawa acquires his GE model, “called the ‘Locomotive’ for its sweeping back style,” 350,000 television sets were in operation in the United States, most on the East Coast, and half around New York City. About two dozen different models were available at that time, ranging from Pilot’s three-inch set at $100 to DuMont’s twenty-inch set at $2,495 ($28,000 in today’s money). There were 27 stations operating in 18 cities. An average of 3.47 persons watched television each night, per set, in a household. Of the 42 hours of television available for viewing each week, the average set was operating for 17 hours. (Sources: http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-25146; http://www.tvhistory.tv/1946-1949.htm.)


**“THE CHESTERFIELD SUPPER CLUB”:** An NBC musical variety radio program (1944–50) and television program (1948–50). “The Chesterfield Supper Club” began on December 11, 1944, as a 15-minute radio show, airing at 7 p.m. weekdays on the NBC Radio Network, sponsored by Chesterfield cigarettes.

Perry Como hosted the radio show on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, while Jo Stafford was the host on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Beginning in 1948, singer Peggy Lee was added to the roster, taking over the Thursday broadcast. According to a 1948 magazine advertisement, Como was broadcast from New York, backed by the Mitchell Ayres orchestra. Stafford and Lee broadcast from Hollywood. The show featured live musical performances by the host, along with various guest artists, including Frank Sinatra, Judy Garland, Eddie Fisher, the Glenn Miller Orchestra, Nat King Cole, Victor Borge, and others.

“The Chesterfield Supper Club” also appeared on NBC television, beginning Christmas Eve, 1948, with a live performance by Como. This was the beginning of his long-standing tradition of television Christmas specials. Como continued to host “The Chesterfield
Supper Club” until 1950, when he moved to CBS and the NBC series ended. (Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chesterfield_Supper_Club.)

**PERRY COMO:** Pierino Roland Como was born May 18, 1912, in Cannonsburg, Pennsylvania, the seventh son of the seventh son (considered to be very lucky in an Italian family). He was one of 13 children, and began learning the barber trade when he was 12. By the age of 21, he owned his own barbershop. Customers would not only get a shave and a haircut, but a little of the 1930s music hit parade from the crooning Como. He was eventually offered a job with a dance band, and Como gave up his barber business.

In 1945, he had his first hit record in the United States, “Till the End of Time,” which paved the way for more hit songs in the 1940s and 1950s. Como also had his own radio series on NBC, and the network gave him a 15-minute showcase on the new medium of television, starting on Christmas Eve, 1948. Nearly two years later, CBS picked up Como for another 15-minute TV show, airing three times a week after the network’s evening news. But in a daring move, Como moved back to NBC, and the network gave him his own hour-long show on Saturday nights, opposite Jackie Gleason’s half-hour version of “The Honeymooners.” It was a risk at the time; singers did not host for an entire hour every week. But Como shocked the industry. His relaxed style immediately landed in television’s top 20, giving Ralph Kramden and company unexpectedly strong competition. That forced Gleason to end his filmed “Honeymooners” experiment after one year and 39 classic episodes. (The season before, Gleason—without Como as competition—had the second most-popular show on U.S. television, right after “I Love Lucy.”)

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Como kept on singing and pleasing television audiences. His show moved to Wednesday nights in 1961, then known as “The Kraft Music Hall.” Como ended his weekly television run in 1963, but did not leave TV altogether. His occasional specials (especially his yearly Christmas events) were always welcome in American homes. And Como was equally welcomed in record stores and jukeboxes. In the early 1970s, he had hits with such songs as “It’s Impossible” and the Don McLean–penned “And I Love You So.” In later years, he continued touring with great success and was given a Kennedy Center Award by President Reagan in 1987. Como died in his sleep in 1988. (Source: http://www.televisionheaven.co.uk/como.htm.)
QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER . . .

1. The characters in *After the War* come from very different backgrounds, and each has a
have unique reason for ending up in the Monkawa boarding house. With which character
do you identify the most? Which character do you like the least? Why?

2. What does it mean to each of these characters to be an American? What does it mean
to be Japanese American as opposed to Japanese? What does it mean to be African
American? How do you answer any of those questions for yourself? What does one have
to give up in order to assimilate into American (or any other) culture? What does one gain?

3. In the play, several characters allude to the coming redevelopment of Japantown and the
Fillmore district. Is what happens a good thing for the neighborhood and/or its people?
What do you think happens to the boarding house at the end of the play? What do you
think happens to each of the characters at the end of the play? How does each of their sto-
ries continue?

4. What do you think of the decision by the u.s. government to put the Japanese into
internment camps during World War II? What do you think of Chester’s decision to
answer “No-No” on the loyalty questionnaire? Does it make him a patriot or a traitor? Was
his resistance justified? What would you do in a similar situation?

5. What do you think of the way the story is told visually? How do the scenic design and
lighting help to tell the story?

6. The music for *After the War* was composed or selected to reflect different influences in
the neighborhood in the 1940s, combining traditional Japanese music with jazz and other
music of the time. How does the music make you feel? What does it tell you about each
of the characters? How does it help to tell their stories?

7. Is the story of *After the War* specific to San Francisco? How might a similar story play
out in a different city or country or historical period? What other ethnic groups might a
story like this apply to today? How would their story be similar or different?
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION...


AFRICAN AMERICANS AND THE FILLMORE


JAPANESE AMERICANS, INTERNMENT, AND JAPANTOWN


---

Sketch of Lillian Okamura by costume designer
Lydia Tanji


**JAZZ**


Sketch of Mary-Louise Tucker by costume designer Lydia Tanji