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English 580 Final Project

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Art, Empathy, & Incarceration: Experiencing American Concentration Camps
through Graphic Narratives

Introduction

In this project I explore the connections between art and text in graphic novels depicting Japanese Incarceration in American Concentration Camps. For this study, I have chosen Miné Okubo's *Citizen 13660*, George Takei's *They Called Us Enemy*, and *Displacement* by Kiku Hughes. These three works each center the author as the protagonist of the narrative, and while each novel differentiates itself in both artistic style and substance, they are uniformly honest in their depictions of Japanese Incarceration, its trauma and legacy.

Okubo's seminal work *Citizen 13660* details her time just before and during Japanese Incarceration during WWII. Her novel stands out as the first published record of Japanese Incarceration by an internee. Additionally, *Citizen 13660* is notable for its historical placement as one of the best records of life at Tanforan Assembly Center and Topaz Internment Camp. Similar to *Citizen 13660*, Takei's *They Called Us Enemy*, documents his time as a child in the Japanese Incarceration camps. While Takei's incarceration is detailed, I have chosen this work because of his choice to frame the narrative around his contemporary reflection on the past and the connections of Japanese Incarceration to present racist exclusionary practices in the United States. Takei's narrative is bookended by his present position as a celebrity and social activist. This positionality alters the way he views his incarceration and impacts his current views and vocal support for minority and marginalized peoples. Shifting away from firsthand experiences,

Hughes' *Displacement* explores the legacy of trauma left to Japanese Americans in the wake of their incarceration. Like Takei, Hughes links the history of Japanese Incarceration to the Civil Rights Movement, the unrest, and racist practices of the 1970s, and racist exclusionary policies enacted during the Trump presidency.

These three works provide a broad view of Japanese Incarceration. More poignantly, *Citizen 13660*, *Displacement*, and *They Called Us Enemy* are all constructed in the form of the graphic memoir, allowing an examination of both text and image as well as the abstraction and ambiguity created in their interaction.

In section one I explore the graphic novel, or perhaps more poignantly the graphic memoir, as a form. This section seeks to educate on *how* to read the graphic novel and introduces Miné Okubo and her work in *Citizen 13660*. In the later sections I place Okubo's *Citizen 13660*, Kiku Hughes' *Displacement*, and *They Called Us Enemy* by George Takei in conversation with Scott McCloud's theory of "Masking" in graphic novels to investigate how the form of the graphic novel creates space for critical empathy. Specifically, I contend that the form of the graphic narrative allows readers a space to experience trauma and its generational aftereffects, in a manner that prose novels do not.

In the final two sections, as Okubo's work precedes that of Takei and Hughes, I argue that *Citizen 13660* paved the way for the exploration of generational trauma in the graphic narrative form, influencing not only the content of *Displacement* and *They Called Us Enemy*, but the choice of form by their authors. And finally, I contend that Hughes and Takei, in writing from a contemporary viewpoint, center their narratives not only around their protagonists' time in American Concentration Camps but also in their experiences of racist propaganda, exclusionist policies, and institutional racism in the United States. Allowing the narratives of

Displacement and *They Called Us Enemy* to connect Japanese Incarceration with present day anti-immigration and racist exclusion practices in America.

The song currently playing is from the *Allegiance Original Broadway Cast* recording, which is based in part on George Takei's life. Entitled "Gaman" it translates to Perseverance, and is sung by Kei Kimura, played by Lea Salonga, when the Kimura family first comes to the Heart Mountain Relocation Center. I have chosen this song as a means to frame the initial way in which Japanese and Japanese American peoples faced their unlawful incarceration. However, I also include this short section to note the way in which many peoples across the United States continue to endure in the wake of generational trauma and continued racism, both institutional and interpersonal.

Gaman,

Matthew Hernandez

The Lyrics to this section are as follows:

It will all be alright

There's a way through this night

Stay strong

On this long road

We bury our pain

There's a word we will say

To help get through each day

We will bear any nightmare

With a simple refrain

Gaman, Gaman