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English 580 Final Project

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

Echoes

According to Kiku Hughes, author of *Displacement*, Okubo's work in *Citizen 13660* provided an important primary source, which documented the construction and appearance of Japanese Incarceration camps, as well as detailed the events that took place in the Tanforan Assembly Center and Topaz Internment Camp. Subsequently, Okubo's work has unknowingly influenced a generation of writers, as currently, the first work dubbed a graphic novel (of which the graphic memoir is considered a sub-genre) is *Bloodstar* published in 1976 by Richard Corben and Robert E. Howard. Having come out thirty years after *Citizen 13660*, it is hard to attribute so much of the genre's success to Corben and Howard, especially as the graphic memoir has continued to rise in popularity, both in size of readership and in choice of form. This is not meant to belittle the significance of *Bloodstar*, as its popularity among the mainstream of comics opened up the form to a generation of authors who have adapted it for narratives both personal and fantastic. Though, because of the personal nature and enduring legacy of *Citizen 13660*, its impact on authors who center personal or community trauma in their graphic narratives, can still be seen.

This is in part due to the abstraction and ambiguity of the art and text discussed in earlier sections. That is to say, the relationship between art and text in *Citizen 13660* creates ambiguities of meaning, which allows their significance and interpretation to change over time: "what is

ungrievable in 1946 gradually becomes grievable in the 1970s and 1980s. Okubo's memoir helps create a future in which redress is possible via its public, textual memorializations of Japanese American losses," and it is that evolution that has brought about works like Kiku Hughes' *Displacement* and George Takei's *They Called Us Enemy*.¹ These ambiguities of meaning also allow *Citizen 13660* to be revisited time and time again, with each reading imparting new knowledge or depths of feeling. And while it may seem only a limited number of scholars and artists draw inspiration from Okubo directly, many more are indirectly influenced by her work.

We can see Okubo's reach by taking a moment to recognize the achievements of George Takei and Kiku Hughes. Hughes has worked on several short form and web comics to critical acclaim and has also written and drawn stories for the incredibly popular *Avatar: The Last Airbender* series of comics as well as its related projects *Avatar: Kora*, and *Avatar: Kyoshi*. George Takei, best known for his role as Sulu in the *Star Trek* franchise, has published a bestselling novel, originated and starred in a role on Broadway, and was voted the most influential person on Facebook in 2012, edging out even President Obama. I list these accolades to note that Okubo's influence on their work has been recognized by both Hughes and Takei, and through them and many others, Miné Okubo's influence continues to be felt.

¹ Stanutz, Katherine. "Inscrutable Greif: Memorializing Japanese American Internment in Miné Okubo's *Citizen 13660*"