Welcome Here: Defining History Through Playwriting

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Stephen Indrisano
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1. Literature Review (Influential Texts)

Theater and history are not separate entities. They operate in tandem, each reflecting and refracting the other: just as social and societal precedents impact the creation of theater, so too does theater address and shape our shared narratives of history. As such, it should come as no surprise that playwrights have been drawn to the intersection of theater and history for centuries, using the power of shared cultural memory to inform a variety of artistic expressions. Works of theater concerning history span genre, scope, and political affiliation alike, utilizing varied dramaturgical strategies construct novel meaning around the shared experience of history. Given that all playwrights stand on the shoulders of giants, I have chosen to preface my creative work with a hybrid literature review of sorts: organized by dramaturgical subtype, each text reviewed hereafter made a measurable impact on my creative process.

a. Theoretical Perspectives

Rebecca Schneider’s *Theater & History* is an invaluable text for understanding the powerful intersection of performance and historiography. “If there is such a thing as embodied history,” she asks, “why would theater not be a kind of living archeology?” (Schneider, 60). In essence, *Theater & History* is about the ways in which performance acts convey meanings which are, themselves, ‘real’ in ways that transcend temporal boundaries. This inter-historical meaning begins in body of the performer and is made ‘real’ in the response of the spectator: “The power of mimesis,” Schneider writes, “is the power of exchange, by which a real response is crafted, provoked, or manipulated in an audience” (Schneider, 64). Thus, an audience’s real response to a performance mimicking a specific history can become a real part of the history itself. Furthermore, she implicates theater with the very narrative underpinnings of history. Schneider
uses Nietzsche’s central thesis from On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life – “any history is also a forgetting” – to provide a mechanism by which theater can participate in the active creation of history:

To explore a nation’s history, its construction and transmission as nation, is necessarily to engage in an analysis of the generative properties of false recall – of the (mis) telling in retelling – the ‘real’ as forged by the ‘faux’ and this, it seems to me, suggests that the history of any nation is a theater history (Schneider, 76).

That is to say, the history of a nation, and that nation’s identity, is as much reliant on what the populace chooses to forget as it is on the events which truly occurred. This perspective will be essential for contextualizing the effect of dramaturgy in relationship to an audience’s understanding of history. While Schneider is often focused on the performance aspects of theater, playwrights also participate in the, “generative properties of false recall,” purposefully engaging and disengaging with the historical record to craft not only a narrative of history, but an aspect of the real lived experience of that history for their audiences. This property of dramaturgy, as laid out by Rebecca Schneider, is not only an influence on my work, but the theoretical backbone of this thesis.

The theories of Bertolt Brecht are also inherent to the dramaturgy of Welcome Here and its many influences. Whereas Schneider’s perspective is concerned with the now in relation to the past, Brecht was always focused on progression. Brecht’s Epic Theater was thoroughly utilitarian: “to qualify as Epic Theater,” he wrote, a work of theater, “must have a socially
practical significance” (Brecht, 132). Central to Brecht’s understanding of a practical theater was his theory of the Alienation, or simply, ‘A’ Effect. In his own words:

What is involved here is, briefly, a technique of taking the human social incidents to be portrayed and labeling them as something striking, something that calls for explanation, is not to be taken for granted, not just natural. The object of this ‘effect’ is to allow the spectator to criticize constructively from a social point of view (Brecht, 125).

Brecht did not want audiences to become immersed in his theater, but instead to be intimately aware of the fictive nature of theater. In this awareness – in being alienated from the action – audiences would be encouraged to put active thought into how they felt about the actions on stage. Brecht’s intent was not to create theater that was unemotional or distant; he wanted audiences to be able to engage with the circumstances of the plot, the ways in which character actions are not inevitable, and the effects of character actions on the plot. “Once the spectator, instead of having an experience, is forced as it were to cast his vote,” Brecht writes, “then a change has been launched which […] begins for the first time to affect the theater’s social function” (Brecht, 39). Brecht wanted Epic Theater to provoke audiences into direct political action, rather than lull them into the sense that the plot was inevitable and determined primarily by ‘human nature’.

Brecht’s Epic Theater, though oriented towards the future, has a specific relationship to the past. “The A-Effect,” he writes, “was principally designed to historicize the incidents portrayed,” in a work of theater (Brecht, 96). ‘Historicize’ in this instance refers to a conscious
incorporation of the cultural and lived elements of a character’s situation which necessarily impact their story. “The idea of man as a function of the environment” was deeply important to Brecht, “[corresponding] to a new way of thinking, the historical way” which countered, “the bourgeois theater [which] emphasized the timelessness of its objects” (Brecht, 96, 97). ‘Timelessness’ was a concept which Brecht fought against because it takes for granted a multitude of factors which are only true for a small subset of people in the contemporary moment; Brecht did not want the injustices of time to be lost to a pervading sense of inevitability. In this way, he is in conversation with Schneider: where Schneider conceives of history as a process by which, “the ‘real’ narrative is ‘forged by the ‘faux’” of purposefully excluded information, Brecht seeks to remind audiences of the very aspects of history we take for granted (Schneider, 76).

b. Allegorical Dramaturgy

One general mode by which playwrights construct history through dramaturgy is allegory. The Oxford English Dictionary defines allegory as, “A story, picture, etc. which uses symbols to convey a hidden or ulterior meaning; a symbolic representation” (Allegory”). For drama, allegory can more specifically be defined as plays whose plots are representative of a different concept than that literally conveyed; often these representations are metaphors for a greater political concept. Many plays which utilize allegory to construct historical narratives are works which Brecht might describe as bourgeois – they seek to tell stories that, using an historical moment as their central metaphor, express fundamental truths about the human condition or the contemporary moment. Allegorical texts concerning history construct meanings
around true events, recontextualizing factual moments to fit within narratives of the playwright’s design. A dramaturgy which utilizes allegory has been prevalent for centuries.

*Julius Caesar* (1623), written by William Shakespeare, is a five-act tragedy based on historical text which engages with themes of populism and political power. Concerning the assassination of Emperor Julius Caesar by a cohort of Roman politicians and the resulting power struggle thereafter, *Julius Caesar* is a prime example of Shakespeare’s enduring appeal. The play is a prototypical allegory, representing a singular historical moment as an emblem of immediate social and emotional resonances. Shakespeare used allegorical dramaturgy repeatedly, to great effect: *Julius Caesar, Coriolanus* (1623), *Antony and Cleopatra* (1623), and *Timon of Athens* (1623), are all historical allegories based directly on the Sir Thomas North translation of Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*. As such, these works were produced within a factual historical context, with Shakespeare’s verse serving to elevate and elucidate the historical record. *Julius Caesar* and its ilk provide a theoretical baseline for allegorical playwrighting, combining a moment from the historical canon with strong thematic resonances to a greater set of human experiences to create a recognizable parable for audiences.

To understand how Shakespeare crafted *Julius Caesar*, it is important to understand his relationship with Plutarch’s *Lives*. Myron Taylor, in his 1973 essay, “Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar and the Irony of History”, writes that William Shakespeare, “made very little effort to ‘distance’ his material,” from his experience of contemporary London (Taylor, 301). Although *Julius Caesar* is unmistakably drawn from Plutarch’s *Lives*, Taylor writes that, “Caesar, Cassius, and Brutus become recognizable English types,” connected to the Shakespeare’s English histories by, “[teaching] the same lesson […]: not that killing a tyrant was wrong, but that men are not the masters of their own fates” (Taylor, 301). Taylor sums up the message of
Shakespeare’s potent historical playwrighting by explaining both the thematic purpose of the text and the plot mechanism by which it is achieved:

Shakespeare manipulated the plot of *Julius Caesar* to refute as clearly as possible the assumptions upon which the conspirators have acted. Men are not the masters of destiny, nor is history without moral significance. […] In killing Julius Caesar, the conspirators create a greater and worse Caesarism (Taylor, 306-307).

For Shakespeare, Plutarch’s *Lives* provided the source material he needed to explore themes of individual agency and control over fate; in turn, the history of that moment would forever exist in relationship to Shakespeare’s text itself. Just as Shakespeare would have been exposed to *Lives* in his education, so too was *Julius Caesar* my first exposure to Roman history. Thus, *Lives* continues – though changed through Shakespeare’s playwrighting – in my life and, in some capacity, in my writing.

Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* (1953) is akin to *Julius Caesar* in that it adheres to the same general formula of allegorical playwrighting, utilizing the historical record as a central metaphor for understanding a thematic or political truth, but differs in both scope and inception. *The Crucible* is derived from a variety of different direct sources, and whereas we cannot be certain of Shakespeare’s motives for writing his histories, we have Miller’s own words to establish his purpose for producing historical theater:

It was not only the rise of ‘McCarthyism’ that moved me, but something which was much more weird and mysterious. It was the fact that a political, objective,
knowledgeable campaign from the far Right was capable of creating not only a
terror, but a new subjective reality, a veritable mystique which was gradually
assuming even a holy resonance (Miller, 3).

Thus, we know that *The Crucible* was very consciously written as an allegory, lent
credence and legitimacy through the historical record. The narrative follows the events of the
Salem Witch trials, finding a protagonist in the character/historical figure of John Proctor, who is
sentenced to death for witchcraft after his community suffered a socially and religiously
sanctioned mass hysteria. Miller intended the hysteria displayed in *The Crucible* to not only
mirror the then-contemporary context of McCarthyism, but to help explain its mechanisms; he
describes the events occurring within the play – and thus, within our shared historical narrative –
as, “a perverse manifestation of the panic which set in among all classes when the balance began
to turn towards greater individual freedom,” and away from the conformity and perceived safety
of a theocracy (Miller, 3).

There is an important distinction to be made between Miller presenting a plot with
themes *exclusive* to his political moment versus Miller presenting a plot with more *universal*
relevance. William J. McGill, Jr., cleanly explores this distinction in the essay, “The Crucible of
History: Arthur Miller’s John Proctor,” extracting Miller’s universal theme from the historical
moment: “Whatever view one takes of [McCarthyism],” he writes, “one must acknowledge that
all hysterias produce injustice because hysteria denies the individual conscience and destroys the
standards of rational proof” (McGill, 263). Regardless of the contemporary political leanings of
Miller or his critics, the universality of his writing around the theme of hysteria through the use
of allegory speaks to a greater truth which transcends both the moment in which the play was
written and the moment the play was written about. Miller seems to have been cognizant of this transcendent quality, given his historical note which states that the characters within *The Crucible* are, “creations of [his] own,” discovered through a historical lens but not constrained by “historical minutia” (Miller, 2). In writing *The Crucible* as an allegory, Miller engaged in the very same “generative properties of false recall,” which Schneider described in *Theater & History*, cherry-picking the historical record into a narrative greater than the sum of its influences.

Though my own play does not use allegory in the same ways that Miller and Shakespeare do, it is still significantly in debt to their work. The central plot of *Welcome Here* uses an amalgamation of contemporary events, as well as fully fictional aspects, to explore themes of political agency. Based on incidents which have occurred on college campuses across the United States within the last five years, *Welcome Here* concerns a fictional debate between an Alt-Right figurehead and a thoroughly qualified woman of color as a representation of the continual conflict between far-right rhetoric and the lived experiences of marginalized groups. Unlike *Julius Caesar* and *The Crucible*, *Welcome Here* does not have a singular non-fictional event at its core, but it does use similar dramaturgical strategies. The “false recall” at the heart of *Welcome Here*’s construction of contemporary events is in the fictionalization of its characters: I am not writing about Richard Spencer or Milo Yiannopoulos, who are both real men associated with the Alt-Right, but rather a kind of amalgamation of their beliefs and rhetorical strategies. By doing so, I am able to construct an image of the Alt-Right which is more representative to the movement than any one figure would be on their own. *Welcome Here* interacts with history using a different style of dramaturgy altogether: documentary dramaturgy.
c. **Documentary Theater**

While allegorical dramaturgy can provide a strong thematic understanding of the past, it is not intended to represent the literal truth of a moment in time. This is not true of all theater concerning history, however: *documentary theater* takes a journalistic approach to staged productions, using text from historical documents as the basis for performance texts. The Oxford Encyclopedia of Drama and Performance describes documentary theater as, “plays written, compiled, or even improvised directly from ‘documentary’ sources […] often incorporating documents themselves directly into performance” (“documentary”). ‘Documentary sources’ can refer to media ranging from court transcripts and written personal correspondences to audiovisual interviews with individuals and archival footage; the unifying factor in what defines a ‘document’ is therefore its factual existence, rather than its narrative value. Whereas allegorical theater concerning history is driven by Schneider’s meaning-construction-by-absence, documentary theater can be better understood through a Brechtian lens. There is, for example, often an implicit A-Effect in documentary theater, as performers self-consciously represent the words of others through the use of factual documents. This discourages the audience from viewing the narrative of a documentary play as fundamentally inevitable; just as with Brecht’s Epic Theater, audiences are confronted with the idea that the ‘plot’ of history is dependent on the actions of its players. Thus, documentary theater is often used as a call-to-action, spurring audiences to engage politically with the topics depicted by the playwright.

*The Exonerated* (2002), written by Jessica Blank and Eric Jensen, is as purely documentarian as documentary theater gets. Constructed entirely from various real texts such as court transcripts, letters, and interviews, it tells the story of the six individuals’ experiences with
being wrongfully convicted and placed on death row by the U.S. criminal justice system in a way which forms a cohesive narrative. It is most often staged minimally, and it is also commonly performed ‘on-book’, meaning the actors performing the script read live from the text of *The Exonerated*, and thus from the historical record itself. There can be no doubt that the readers are, themselves, actors; in fact, the first major performances featured famous actors as readers. This doubles down on the A-Effect inherent to the text, as audience members are unlikely to engage in the intense immersion that Brecht theorized distracted audiences from the physical realities of political and historical contexts.

*The Exonerated*, in documenting the lives of death row inmates, became an important text to understanding how incarcerated peoples in the United States are exploited – and in doing so, became a part of the history of the very subject it documented. Katy Ryan, author of, “State Killing, The Stage of Innocence, and *The Exonerated,*” explains:

One of the most dramatic performances took place on 17 December 2002 at the Chicago Center for the Performing Arts. Then-governor Ryan, his top staff, and members of the general assembly were in attendance. [...] Approximately three weeks later, and three days before leaving office, Ryan granted a mass commutation, and [the show’s director] Balaban was told that the play had influenced his decision (Ryan, 126).

Thus, in detailing recent history – the lives of current, living individuals – Blank and Jensen consciously shifted the narrative of justice surrounding imprisoned peoples on death row. They created a new counter-narrative, through the living and lived experiences of six individuals;
however, as much as documentary theater present factual truth, it too must engage with the same exclusionary practices that are used to craft allegory in order to translate to the stage. Ryan describes the writing process of *The Exonerated* as a “documentary paradox – between staying out of the way,” by allowing the factual record to speak for itself, “and ruthlessly cutting,” any material which did not serve the narrative of the play (Ryan, 128). This paradox is at the heart of all creative decisions in documentary theater, and therein lies *The Exonerated*’s struggle between facts and thematic truths. Ultimately, though documentary theater is constructed from factual sources, it often functions similarly to allegorical theater, engaging with greater thematic structures. This can be a positive quality, elevating the factual experiences of individuals to a narrative which is relatable and can thus affect political change – and in the case of *The Exonerated*, did.

Documentary dramaturgy plays a massive role in *Welcome Home*. Roughly half of the show utilizes a variety of historical documents, which are linked not by a traditional Aristotelian plot structure, but by a thematic linkage. By presenting documents from American history, I encourage audience members to refrain from being fully immersed in the fictional aspects of my play in favor of thinking about the factual framework that they reside within – and which the audience resides within as well. Furthermore, by selecting sources from two specific moments – World War Two and the 2016 Presidential Election – I am drawing an explicit link between the circumstances by which Japanese internment was instituted and the growing xenophobia of our contemporary times. By using documentary elements, and therefore by drawing from Brechtian theory, I attempt to convince audiences to that their own actions can impact the future – that they can, “cast their own vote” (Brecht, 125).
d. Docudrama: Mixed Dramaturgies

In practice, very rarely do playwrights operate strictly within the bounds of either pure documentary or allegorical theater. It is much more common for playwrights to use components of both styles in order to reach the specific thematic resonances that they are interested in exploring. Luis Valdez’s Zoot Suit (1979) utilizes the strengths of both paradigms by not only presenting and representing historical texts, but placing them within the context of an allegoric account of the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial. In some ways, Zoot Suit functions similarly to The Crucible, depicting events which are based on the historical record but are not factually accurate. The plot of the play is based on the historical event of the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial of 1942, during which seventeen young Mexican-American men were put on trial for the murder of José Gallardo Díaz. The protagonist is a character named Henry Reyna, who is based on the historical figure of Henry Levya, but whose life story and character traits Valdez reimagined to better suit his narrative purposes.

Other aspects of Zoot Suit are more aligned with documentary dramaturgy: the inherently biased instructions for the defendants during the Sleepy Lagoon trial, such as being forced to stand whenever addressed, were fully accurate depictions of historical texts (Lucas, 74). Additionally, Valdez also chose to write several abstract archetypal characters which represent forces present in history itself. The Press, a character representative of biased white media coverage of the Zoot Suiters, is used both to present real newspaper headlines from the time period and to physicalize the ways in which white supremacy functions in media and society. Thus, Valdez crafted a historical narrative which actively challenges the standard historical narrative by engaging in both allegorical ‘generative mis-remembering’ and Brechtian ‘historical’ use of documentary text.
In *Zoot Suit*, Valdez is reclaiming history, reclaiming a central figure who had been previously vilified by white America. Ashley Lucas, in “Reinventing the Pachuco: The Radical Transformation from the Criminalized to the Heroic in Luis Valdez’s play *Zoot Suit*”, writes that Valdez, “revises the historical memory,” of Chicana/os, “transforming these youths from symbols of criminality into heroic icons of radical resistance against cultural oppression” (Lucas, 62). The history which Valdez revises with *Zoot Suit* is one of identity, image, and bigotry. Lucas explains that the, “racialized depiction,” of Mexican American youth in the media in the form of the Pachuco, “linked all ethnic Mexicans in the United States to crime, defining them as fundamentally outside the mainstream of society” (Lucas, 64). It is within the context of image-oriented othering that Valdez sets to work reforming a cultural touchstone: by physicalizing, then empowering, the archetypical Pachuco, Valdez is able to reinvent not only the factual narrative, but the way in which audiences relate to the very concepts. Lucas explains:

This pachuco literally cuts through the defamatory press coverage and uses his larger-than life status to attack the negative stereotypes about Mexican Americans. […] He embodies the menace of Mexican American youth as perceived by the mainstream and uses the power of that terrorizing symbol to reverse the audience’s expectations of him (Valdez, 66).

This empowerment and reform utilizes both allegory and documentary modes of dramaturgy. The Pachuco figure, as the focal point of *Zoot Suit*, exists within the realm of fiction. He is representative of the spirit of Chacano/a youth, and his presence throughout the play guides the plot to be representative not only of the individual plights of those accused at the
Sleep Trial Lagoon, but of all marginalized people who choose to express themselves in spite of societal oppression. The documentary aspects of *Zoot Suit* add to this allegorical set-up by maintaining Brecht’s A-Effect, as audience members are consistently confronted by the factual aspects of the play, as well as by the biased nature of traditionally trusted forms of media. Thus, *Zoot Suit* has the power to both reform the Sleepy Lagoon trial’s historical narrative by re-fashioning it as an allegory and to encourage audience members to be aware of injustices in their own time by utilizing documentary elements.

If *Zoot Suit* represents a successful use of docudramatic dramaturgy, *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1955) adapted by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett may be indicative of its dangers. Goodrich and Hackett adapted the published diary of Anne Frank, entitled “The Diary of a Young Girl,” which chronicles Anne Frank’s innermost thoughts and emotions during the period in which her family hid from the Nazi regime in Amsterdam, leading up to their eventual discovery and capture. As such, *The Diary of Anne Frank* is one narrative based on one main historical text, heavily utilizing words directly from its source. In dramatizing a personal narrative, Goodrich and Hackett were forced to make choices regarding how best to represent the life of Anne Frank and her family through the dramatic form; this is the very same ‘documentary paradox’ which Blank and Jenson experienced when writing *The Exonerated*, as Goodrich and Hackett also had to find the balance “between staying out of the way […] and ruthlessly cutting” (Ryan, 128). However, in choosing to adapt Anne Frank’s diary as a semi-fictionalized text, their responsibility to the Frank family – and to all victims of the holocaust – to remain as close to the factual truth was extensive.

The play text cannot have hoped to represent each individual aspect of Anne Frank’s actual diary; doing so would have been logistically impossible due to the time-space constraints
of theater. Thus, they represented her life through the use of direct quotes, edited quotes, and imagined or fabricated interactions based on real events chronicled by Anne Frank. In doing so, they also chose which thematic resonances to construct given the document they worked with. It is also worth noting that Anne Frank herself did not shy away philosophical writing – Goodrich and Hackett’s adaptation not only had to contend with expressing the complexities of a life in hiding from the Nazi regime, but also the depth of thought produced by the young Ms. Frank herself. Unfortunately, the balance between historical fact as represented by the documentary aspects of the text and the allegorical elements is not one that Goodrich and Hackett fully achieve.

In attempting to portray the life of Anne Frank as a generalizable human experience, Goodrich and Hackett have drawn criticism for ignoring the specificity of Nazi antisemitism. James Dublin, in his essay, “The Generalization of Holocaust Denial: Meyer Levin, William James, and the Broadway Production of The Diary of Anne Frank,” is particularly leery of changes made to the source text in the name of generalization. He cites, among other alterations, the removal of, “the emphatic repetition of the word ‘Jews,’” during one soliloquy, “by prefacing the passage with: ‘Then things go very bad for the Jews,’ and by characterizing the object of bigotry as a generic you” (Dublin, 235). This example, among others, demonstrates, “an evasion that was either intentional or increasingly emergent in the Broadway production, despite periodically overt references to Jews and to things Jewish.” (Dublin, 235). To add a layer of complication to these changes, Dublin also indicates that the removal of specific references to Judaism were actively encouraged by Otto Frank, Anne’s father, in the adaptation of “The Diary of a Young Girl”: 
I always said that [the Diary] is not a Jewish book [. . .] though Jewish sphere, sentiment and surrounding is the background [. . .] so do not make a Jewish play of it! (Otto Frank, 27) (Excerpts selected by Dublin, 236).

Thus, Goodrich and Hackett’s work adapting The Diary of a Young Girl demonstrates the profound challenges and repercussions of dramatizing history. An audience’s experience of a play – especially concerning adaptation and direct quotation – is fully in the hands of the playwright. Thus, the choices that Goodrich and Hackett made surrounding specificity have a very real impact on the experience of the history itself for their audience. To James Dublin, a generalized recontextualization of the holocaust is actively dangerous: “specificity,” Dublin writes, “protects against the eradication of national and religious identity.” (Dublin, 238).

While Goodrich and Hackett’s choices may be problematic, The Diary of Anne Frank remains an influential text for my work on Welcome Here. Given the deeply personal nature of playwriting, it is prudent to note that one of the earliest works of theater to truly give me pause was a production of Goodrich and Hackett’s The Diary of Anne Frank, produced at my own high school. Though I can now appreciate the adaptation as being potentially inadequate in terms of representing a factual account of the Holocaust, the power of the performance I attended continues to color my understanding of the human toll of the Nazi regime. My work on Welcome Here, then, attempts to find a way to work with the same bold precision of Valdez’s Zoot Suit, while striving for the raw impact of my first experience with Goodrich and Hackett’s The Diary of Anne Frank. It is my hope that the recontextualized historical documents within Welcome Here do not lose their original weight, nor their original meanings.
Recontextualization can certainly be a powerful tool in the hands of a skilled playwright: the overwhelming success of Lin Manuel Miranda’s *Hamilton* (2015), monetarily, critically, and otherwise, can be attributed to the Miranda’s complex dramaturgical strategies which retell the founding of the United States as radically generalizable. Like *Julius Caesar* roughly 400 years before it, *Hamilton* is mainly an adaptation of single-source historical text; however, it benefits from utilizing both allegorical and documentarian dramaturgies. While Miranda’s most influential source was Ron Chernow’s 2004 biography, “Alexander Hamilton,” he included both documentary textual selections from history and a truly staggering number of reference points from contemporary music history. Thus, Miranda’s libretto approaches narratives of history from allegorical, textual, and *cultural* perspectives, implicating contemporary popular culture in a largely mythologized story.

Miranda’s dramaturgical strategies extend beyond the strictly textual. By casting exclusively people of color as the major players of the American revolution, Miranda has asserted a place for Black, Hispanic, and Asian peoples in the founding of the United States. This, in itself, can be thought of as a form of “generative false recall,”: Miranda has chosen to leave the whiteness of the founding figures of the American Revolution out of his musical (Schneider, 76). Miranda states that the ideals of the United States, and the legacy of its founding, does not belong exclusively to white Americans. Predicting the problematic nature of this choice – several of the characters in question owned slaves – Miranda also found ways to comment on the painful history of race in America without giving up the central universality of its allegory. In the song, “My Shot,” for example, Alexander Hamilton proclaims that, “[King George] ain’t ever gonna set us free, so there will be a revolution in our century. Enter me!” (Miranda, 7). This is followed directly by Laurens exclaiming, “We’ll never truly be free until
those in bondage have the same rights as you and me, you and I. Do or die. Wait till I sally in on a stallion with the first black battalion” (Miranda, 7). These words gain significance from the very people they are spoken by – non-white actors – but also in the musical form of hip-hop which has been historically disparaged by white media. In this way, Hamilton encourages us to revise our view of history as fundamentally white, even for such heavily mythologized periods as the American Revolution. While Welcome Home functions very differently from Hamilton, any playwright who wants to interface with American history would be doing themselves a massive disservice by ignoring Miranda’s complex dramaturgical work.

e. Alternative Dramaturgies

There are, of course, multitudes of ways to create a performance which interacts with historical narratives - not all roads lead to Shakespeare’s Rome. Though Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit ... (1992) has no ‘play text’, so to speak, it is an important performative exploration of history nonetheless. Artists Fusco and Gómez-Peña perform as members of the fully fictional Guatinau tribe, a ‘previously undiscovered tribe’ hailing from the island of Guatinau. The performance was treated as an installation of sorts, being presented as a celebration of the 500-year anniversary of Christopher Columbus ‘discovering’ the Americas. It traveled to a variety of locations, including museums, art galleries, and other institutional public spaces, in which Fusco and Gómez-Peña would perform satirical characters which were exaggerated versions of racist the ‘native on display’ trope. Their performance relied heavily on the very real history of exhibiting non-white humans as specimens to be wondered over, exotisized to the point of inhumanity – a practice started by Cristopher Columbus himself (Fusco, 146). Being an overt parody of the ways in which native
peoples are depicted by colonial and imperialist cultures, *Two Undiscovered Amerindians Visit ...* is a different kind of representation of history than other works.

Given that it is a performance piece to be interacted with, rather than a ‘traditional’ stage play, *Visit* derives much of its meaning from the contexts it is inscribed within and creates without. This, however, turns out to be a dangerous trait: audiences at most installation sites were all too ready to take *Visit* at face value, as a legitimate part of the histories it critiques. In, “The Couple in the Cage: A Guatinaui Odyssey,” Bruce Mannheim describes the satire of *Visit* as “double-voiced, […] containing within it an instance of the very discourse it is imitating” (Mannheim, 126). That is, in order to satirize the stereotype of the ‘caged savage’, Fusco and Gómez-Peña had to embody the very trope they were critiquing. However, Fusco and Gómez-Peña found that despite their efforts to exaggerate and mock the racist colonial-era trope, many people who interacted with *Visit* did not realize their work was satirical. To continue Mannheim’s verbiage, *Visit*’s audiences often experienced it, “monovocally,” taking in only the discourse and not the critique (Mannheim, 126).

It is tempting to view audiences’ ignorance about *Visit* as evidence that the piece ‘failed’ in some way; after all, were Fusco and Gómez-Peña using either allegorical or documentary dramaturgy, we would expect audiences to leave their experience with *Visit* having gained a clear, predictable message. However, to view *Visit* in this way disregards the artist’s intentions. Coco Fusco, in an article entitled, “The Other History of Intercultural Performance,” explains:

> We worked within disciplines that blur distinctions between the art object and the body (performance), between fantasy and reality (live spectacle), and between history and dramatic reenactment (the diorama). The performance was interactive,
focusing less on what we did than how people interacted with us and interpreted our actions. [...] We intended to create a surprise or "uncanny" encounter, one in which audiences had to undergo their own process of reflection as to what they were seeing (148).

With this in mind, the ambiguity inherent to Visit is not a sign of dramaturgical weakness, but rather the very intended effect. Fusco and Gómez-Peña’s work encourages their audiences to think about the media which they consume – which returns us to Brecht. However, unlike Brecht’s Epic Theater, the ‘live spectacle’ aspects of Visit encourage a kind of role play, in which, “many audience members felt entitled to assume the role of the colonizer, only to then find themselves uncomfortable with the implications of the game” (Fusco, 152). This is a significant dramaturgical departure from what we might consider ‘standard’ theatrical practice – and yet, it provides the mechanism by which Visit interacts with history. After all, we are all constantly in contact with societal scripts handed down to us. Perhaps because of this, Fusco writes that over time they became less interested in who did or did not take their installation at face value, and more interested in, “figuring out what the audience's sense of the rules of the game and their role in it” (158). History, and our lived sense of it, exists as those very rules of engagement.

The dramaturgy of Visit is deeply important to Welcome Here. My work was originally conceived as a site-specific play, to be produced in a venue which would lend itself to an actual university sponsored debate. There is direct audience-performer interaction, which can be unpredictable; the work of Fusco and Gómez-Peña’s showed me that uncertainty does not mean failure. By challenging audiences to reconceive of their relationship to the play text, I am also
asking them to think about, “the rules of the game” – where Fusco and Gómez-Peña were interested in complicity in racist tropes, I am interested in complicity in racist rhetoric (Fusco, 158). It is my hope that those who experience Welcome Here will consider the very act of sitting and watching as an active choice in its own right. I have attempted to utilize many of the dramaturgical strategies present in the works of this literature review: ideally, audiences should experience the debate as representative of broader trends in America, understand that the debate itself is only one part of a greater historical context, and be aware that their decisions at the debate matter.

2. Critical Reflection (Writing Process)

Welcome Here is a one act play incorporating aspects of drama, documentary, and performance-art-style dramaturgy. Intended to be staged in a lecture hall on a university campus in the present day, it consists of a debate between a fictional Alt Right figurehead named Atticus Wolfe and an accomplished special collections librarian and Jewish woman of color named Harriet Zotia. The debate stalls out, with neither participant willing or able to concede or move forward from the topic of immigration. As the two trade barbs, their disagreements become increasingly personal. Wolfe, who is an anti-Semite, pushes Dr. Zotia too far by implying that her Jewish ancestors were rightfully barred from entering the U.S. while fleeing Nazi occupation during World War Two. Thus, confronted with the racist rhetoric of the Alt Right, Dr. Zotia decides that the debate is beyond repair, and initiates an audience vote to help her decide the best course of action: stay, and be used to legitimize the Alt Right, or leave and give Wolfe an unchallenged platform. At this point, one of two endings can occur: if Dr. Zotia leaves, Wolfe attempts to plug a variety of Alt Right media outlets before being compelled to make closing
statements. If Dr. Zotia stays, she repeatedly calls Wolfe’s legitimacy into question. This infuriates him to the point of reverting to the kinds of rhetoric the Alt Right engages in when not in the public eye – namely, hate speech. The debate ends with nothing agreed upon.

Woven between the continuous dialogue of the debate are more abstract sections of historical document presentation. These sections are most closely aligned with the documentary dramaturgy of *The Exonerated*, though they also emulate Valdez’s work with archetype. During these portions, Dr. Zotia and Wolfe put on newspaper masks, signifying a character transformation from realistic characters to archetypical presenters. Wolfe becomes The Jester: he serves as the mouthpiece for most of the documents, performing the text of each document as an actor might; he revels in the intensity of the past. Dr. Zotia becomes The Sage: a translator figure, placing the documents in question into an historical context; she is motivated only by a desire to make sense of chaos. Thus, the fictional narrative is framed by a greater historical context, shedding light on the ways in which the rise of the Alt Right, their rhetoric, and their goals are more familiar to American history than might be comfortable. Heavy production elements, including audio-visual components and properties work, serve to frame the documents in question as inherent to our shared racist history as Americans, rather than as anomalies in an otherwise uncomplicated history of progress. Ultimately, my play proposes a narrative of history which is at least partially cyclical, in which racism informs racist policies and perpetuates racism for the next generation.

*Welcome Here* did not begin as a complex docudrama – when I began the thesis process in 2016, I had no idea I would end up writing a play. I had originally intended to do research into site-specific lighting design. Then, November came and much of what I believed about America was challenged. Following the 2016 presidential election, I was shocked into an
awareness of the massive divide between the bubble in which I reside (as a leftist queer playwright in Burlington, Vermont), and the people who live in “Trump country”. The people who had voted for Donald Trump seemed so alien - and often, in opposition - to me. I had been disturbed by the rhetoric of the President Elect, especially given his popularity among a rough cohort of neo-nazis and hardcore isolationists known as the Alt Right. Because of these anxieties, I set about to find a way to put into perspective how exactly our current political situation came to be.

The first iterations of this project were not original works at all - I had fully intended to direct an established political play. My thinking has always been concerned with immersive theater, in which audience members of a performance are placed within the performance space and encouraged to interact with the play as internal to the action, rather than separate from it. As such, my first idea was to attempt to stage a production of *The Diary of Anne Frank* in a cramped attic or crawlspace; what would it do for an audience to be forced to contend with the physical ramifications of enclosure? Ultimately, this idea was scrapped, due in part to time and resource constraints, but also because it would not get to the all-important contemporary *why and how* I had been searching for. I read dozens of plays, finding myself drawn to theater which conceptualized the past in terms of allegory. I cherished the thematic clarity of plays which could take a moment from the past and neatly apply it to their time. However, I could not shake the feeling that this moment was different somehow from the moments in which the likes of Miller, Valdez, and Athol Fugard wrote. After much discussion with my academic mentors, I decided to attempt write that which I could not find.

My own *why and how* writing process was largely uneven. The first iteration of the script, then entitled *A Moderated Conversation with a Fascist*, had a narrow focus on the effects
of neo-fascist rhetoric and had no docudrama elements whatsoever. My research efforts were focused strictly on contemporary neo-fascist and racist movements in the United States, with a specific focus on the Alt Right and their strategies, tendencies, and forms of media. I began by creating Atticus Wolfe, writing a ten-minute play which detailed the effects of racist and fear-mongering rhetoric on a white high school student. This allowed me to play in the realm of Alt Right thought, representing their talking points and general sentiments while also beginning to figure out how to express the consequences of their speech to an audience. Carrying this voice over into Conversation was perhaps the main success of the draft - I was starting to express the how of the attraction of xenophobic rhetoric, even when it takes the form of hate speech.

As vile as some of the dialogue in Welcome Here is, it pales in comparison to the actual in-group rhetoric used by the Alt Right. I used a combination of academic and direct research into the Alt-Right, which is to say that I consumed a lot of the media that Alt Right groups use to recruit white men of my age. The CQ Research Primer on the Alt-Right was an invaluable resource, written by Marcia Clemet – specifically her overview of the Alt-Right’s strategy of campus outreach:

[The Anti-Defamation League] catalogued 63 incidents of movements distributing fliers in January and February, a significant increase from 2016. A number of [Alt-Right] activists also are giving speeches (256).

It should be noted that, during the writing process, anti-immigrant posters were distributed across our campus as well. Thus, the actual experience of consuming Alt-Right propaganda in researching for Wolfe’s character and mannerisms was often overwhelmingly
real. As a queer individual, much of the rhetoric seen on Alt-Right forums are direct threats against my being. Additionally, it was difficult to read virulent racism without thinking about the safety of my three cousins, all of whom are mixed-race and quite dark-skinned.

Thus, creating Wolfe was my first experience interacting with American history. Though he is modeled after specific Alt Right figures, such as Richard Spencer and Milo Yiannopoulos, as I began to explore deeper into his voice and backstory, I found myself being influenced by less contemporary reference points. The Alt-Right is incredibly image-oriented, attempting to emulate “traditional” values in their public appearances and rally policies. In a memo to the attendees of the Unite the Right rally, Andrew Anglin of the Alt-Right forum wrote, “men’s hair looks better short, and beards look better well-trimmed,” as well as, “we simply must be cool” (qt. in Conti). Additionally, he stated that, “We need to keep women on the sidelines. Not speaking, not leading, and with no official membership in anything” (qt. in Conti). These image concerns harken back to the history of right-leaning style in America: the strict gendering of imagery and the militaristic short-hair-only being signifiers of an ideology intentionally harkening to the ‘good old days’ of the pre-civil rights era.

With all that in mind, the first full drafts of Conversation were riddled with dramaturgical issues. Harriet Zotia did not yet exist, and Wolfe’s debate partner, Professor Rebecca Masterson, was woefully unable to express why Wolfe’s talking points were immoral. There were two additional characters, both unnamed: one, a black-bloc wearing Antifa and the other a Good Ol’ Boy, who would come to physical blows at the climax of the play. In this original draft, Wolfe “wins” the debate by being willing and able to assist in assaulting the Antifa protestor; both the Moderator and Professor Masterson would then leave in disgust and fear. This was a misguided central metaphor; in essence, I had written a play about a woman who fails to act against neo-
fascist violence and is to be seen as at fault for their victory as a result. I was failing to come to grips with the actual mechanisms by which the Alt Right functions: I assumed that violence alone was propelling their cultural significance, rather than their words. I may have been making an attempt at answering how the Alt Right functions – though admittedly, on a surface level - but it did nothing to satisfy my desire to know why our current moment is so susceptible to those tactics. After wrestling with the script for a few drafts, I decided I needed to go back to the drawing board and begin anew.

It is important to note the emotional and psychological journey that I had to go through to come to the format that Welcome Home takes now. The full rewrite occurred over winter break, in just under a month. Perhaps the most important document within the piece to my creative process is the interview with Rose Nieda. I had been in a writing slump after about a week of rewrites, then rewrites of rewrites, then free associations, plus a large amount of time spent staring at blank screens. On a whim, while doing a combination of online research and procrastination, I began looking for personal narratives of Japanese incarceration survivors. That is when I ‘met’ Rose Nieda. She had been forced to go to camp right before she would have gone to college, deciding to cooperate with the authorities out of a sense of responsibility for her parents. She was open about the fear and anxiety that her incarceration caused, and about the feeling of being portrayed as dangerous and alien by the media and by society. I felt renewed in work, ready to work towards understanding why rhetoric is, itself, important.

Only once I had started to engage with the dramaturgies underlying the plays I had previously researched did I begin to understand our contemporary moment. In starting from scratch, I chose to incorporate elements of contemporary docudrama, which can utilize elements of both fictive narrative and documentary verbatim work. The debate stayed important to the
structure of the piece, given how the 2016 Presidential Debates were sites of such massive political division. However, these sections would be supplemented by a much broader context by which an audience – not to mention the playwright – might come to understand the weight of the rhetoric involved. The topic of Japanese internment felt relevant to our own time: by taking day trips to the National Archives and the Library of Congress, I learned that two decades before the wartime paranoia of the 1940s, there was the meteoric rise of the Klu Klux Klan during 1920s. The Klan advocated for the Immigration Act of 1924 – thus, racism informed policy which would continue to stoke similar anti-Japanese racism two decades later, eventually feeding back into more policy. While I was busy researching, Donald Trump instituted an immigration ban of his own.

Research alone, however, does not theater make. I struggled with how best to incorporate my newfound knowledge. At first, I tried to use Dr. Zotia’s expertise as a librarian to justify a writing the factual history directly into her lines. This, however, presented multiple problems – practically speaking, it is not very compelling, nor all that believable, for an otherwise realistic character to have an encyclopedic knowledge of the major historical focal points I wanted to work with. More importantly, I was concerned that giving factual accounts to a character who is fictional might give the impression that the documents themselves were not real, but perhaps equally fictional representations of factual sources. I did not, in other words, want audiences to view Rose Nieda as if she were John Proctor in The Crucible: based in fact, but certainly not ‘real’.

Using a dramaturgy similar to Luis Valdez’s work with El Pachuco and The Press, I found an expression for the documents in archetypical characters rather than in contrived moments within the realistic drama. By creating the Newspaper Personas, I was attempting to
depict the overarching historical context of cyclical racism which exists within the American collective unconscious, without it being unclear how factual that context is. By utilizing mask, I distanced my performers from their need to create a realistic character, instead encouraging them to feel the masks as extensions of themselves which guide a general aesthetic – a direct influence of Brecht’s Epic Theater. These masks also serve to clarify differences between the more realistic plot portions and the more abstract docudrama elements for an audience. I chose newspaper as the material look of the masks in part to call back to previous uses of newspaper in theater, from the Federal Theater Project’s living newspapers, to Valdez’s larger-than-life print screen.

The way in which Welcome Here continually shifts between distinct fiction and documentary segments is a way for me to encourage audiences not to view history as inherently separate from the contemporary. This gives both the dramatic-allegorical and the documentary segments of Welcome Here room to fulfil their dramatic purposes without interfering with the needs of the other. Docudramas like The Exonerated thrive in the understanding that they have legitimacy through authenticity – I did not want to muddy the waters around how real the documents I present are. Similarly, by allowing the fictional aspects of Welcome Here to remain representational, I have tried to encourage audiences to consider the contemporary relevancy on college campuses such as the University of Vermont. In relation to each other, they grow more potent: the fiction gives the fact a more immediate emotional resonance, whereas the facts give the fiction a more obvious historical relevancy to the lives of the audience. As an added benefit, the continual shifts between the two allude to the cyclical perspective of history which I am attempting to convey.
Ultimately, I cannot fully control what audiences might gain from *Welcome Here*. However, I have taken a page from performance artists like Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gómez-Peña in allowing them a forum with which to interact – and thus, think about – the text. The central moment of *Welcome Here* is a vote during which the audience is asked to help Dr. Zotia decide whether or not she should remain at the debate in light of Mr. Wolfe’s abhorrent actions. In that moment, when audience members are instructed to discuss with their neighbors and come to a consensus, I hope that they engage with the themes I have presented. I want them to feel the weight of the history that I felt in writing this play, potentially incorporating the documents into consideration for their votes. As they discuss, they should be daunted – will it really matter either way? It will, as they will find out. There are two possible endings, and neither is fully predictable. This, then, becomes the history I want to express: one in which, despite all of the rhetoric and policy, despite biases and racism and hopelessness, a room full of voting individuals can still affect change. I hope that this moment shifts the rules of engagement with the piece, and thus shifts how the audience relates to our moment in history. We may not know what the vote will bring, but it is the only point at which the audience has an opportunity to break the cycle of history.
Works Cited


3. **Script**

Welcome Here: A Docudrama

Stephen Indrisano
Characters:

ATTICUS J. WOLFE: Prominent speaker for the Alt-Right. Casual, utterly confident; has a hidden, but intense temper and a mean streak a mile wide. 26. Feels in his heart that he is part of the master race. White.

DOCTOR HARRIET ZOTIA: Research librarian working in special collections, working with documents pertaining to 1930s Japanese incarceration. African American woman in her late thirties. Stubborn belief that there is an objective reality. Unflinching. Bookish.


Note: This play has heavy audio/visual components. Lines that are played off a file, rather than being spoken, are marked with brackets, as follows:

[ROSE]

[Words, words, words]

Lines which are played and lip-synced by an actor are indicated in a similar way:

NEWSPAPER WOLFE

[Words, words, words]
Dramaturgical notes:

In this play, characters appear both as themselves and as Personas. These Personas are more referred to as “Newspaper” figures, in reference to their costume component. It is imperative that these Personas are treated as allegorical figures outside of the narrative of the debate; they are not concerned with emotions, only with fact. They relish the presentation of documents and are not affected by the implications of history on their base characters.

Additionally, this play engages in a type of storytelling more often associated with immersive forms of media, such as video games and performance arts, by having an ending which can vary depending on audience choices. There is the possibility of one of two “endings” depending on audience vote.
Setting: A recognizable lecture hall / academic building / ballroom / wherever is locally understood to be a place which would host a sponsored lecture series on campus. Should be seating enough for at least 50 people, composing an audience as well as space for the action to occur. There is a microphone set up for the Moderator offstage, as well as one for audience questions (as might exist in a presidential-style debate).

At Rise: The audience has entered and taken their seats. There are ushers helping people find their places, encouraging them to sit further up front, etc. Ushers will distribute the program, as well as the Questions for Debate pamphlet. When the audience is seated, MODERATOR begins:
Welcome, once again, to the McCarthy Debate Series. This is a semi-structured discussion forum devoted to inspiring thoughtful conversation, as sponsored and broadcast by the University of Vermont. In just a moment, our two participants will take their podiums and give brief opening remarks. We will then hold a questions and answers forum, in which audience members will be encouraged to engage the participants directly. Those of you who have not received this evening’s program, which includes our Questions for Debate, please refer to an usher. Now, join me in welcoming our first guest: Mr. Atticus J. Wolfe.

WOLFE

Thank you! And thank you all for the warm reception. I know that for many of you, this may be the first time you’ve seen a live human being who publicly associates with the Alt-Right. It may come as a surprise that I do not have horns and a curly tail, nor did I bring a cross to burn behind my podium - I’ve heard this is a no smoking campus. [Beat] Anyways, I appreciate the hospitality. It’s refreshing to be here, to see Vermont, where the beauty of the mountains is only
WOLFE (Cont.)

eclipsed by your proud regional heritage. I wish I could say that I feel at home in Burlington, but as you know, college towns are notoriously left-leaning. Upon arrival here in Burlington, I was harassed by a gang of Antifa thugs, brandishing signs and possibly weapons. So let my opening statement be this: I come in peace, as an ambassador for my movement. Tonight, all I ask is that we peek out from our collective bubbles and try to understand – on a human level – the folks sitting right next to us, day in and day out. Thank you.

MODERATOR

Our other participant tonight is equally influential to her own corner of American culture. Dr. Harriet Zotia [Enter ZOTIA] may not have a vast social media presence, but her work as a librarian, as a curator and caretaker of historical documents, has earned her acumen and prestige from institutions of academia and government alike. She holds a Ph. D. in Library Science from the University of Washington, and has worked in special collections at the Library of Congress for just short of a decade. She is a sharp wit and formidable presence at many a conference. Please give Dr. Zotia a warm welcome.

ZOTIA

Thank you. I am very rarely in the company of so many civic-minded individuals. Much of my time is spent underground, where I work to ensure the survival of important historical documents. Currently, I am working with scholars from both the Smithsonian institute and the U.S. government to collect and maintain documents regarding the period of so-called Japanese internment – or more accurately, Japanese incarceration – during World War Two. It is challenging, often emotionally draining work. I have found that what we think of as the strictly contemporary – biases, rhetoric, even policy – actually branch far back into our nation’s history,
an unending reverberance of progress and regress. Also, before we begin – I would like to address the elephant in the room: I am conflicted about the University’s decision to provide Mr. Wolfe a platform to speak. I find his stances abhorrent, which is a viewpoint I will neither apologize for, nor attempt to hide. It is my hope, then, that the indisputable power of historical fact – of the truth – will be with us tonight. I am sure that this will be a lively evening. Thank you.

MODERATOR

The topic of today’s conversation is the interplay of politics and civic life in the 21st century. As is tradition, the questions for our debate will be read by members of the audience. An usher will be coming by shortly to select an individual to present our first question. If you are chosen, please rise and come forward to the microphone provided up front.

[An usher selects an audience member and walks them to the microphone.]

When you are ready, please read our first question aloud.

[It reads: What role should immigration play in contemporary America?]

[A slow building crackling sound, evoking a radio being tuned to an AM frequency.

ZOTIA and WOLFE don their newspaper masks.]

MODERATOR

The date is April 13th, 1924. Excerpts from a letter to the editor of the New York Times:
NEWSPAPER ZOTIA

This document concerns the Immigration Act of 1924. Mounting paranoia about immigrants from Asian countries – as stoked by the rise of the Klu Klux Klan –prompted Congress to put forth a bill which would outright stop immigration from Asia.

[ZOTIA and WOLFE move away from their podiums; an image of the document is projected]

NEWSPAPER WOLFE [Clearing throat]

The Japanese know as well as we do that this bill is not aimed solely at them, and that it is not intended as any reflection upon them as people. It is designed to preserve to us our own heritage and to prevent ourselves from being inundated by alien peoples whom we cannot assimilate socially or amalgamate into our body politic.

NEWSPAPER ZOTIA

Double-speak is typical of racist rhetoric. By framing the argument around a White “us” – “Our heritage”, for example – the speaker can effectively make bigoted statements about others without it being the quote-unquote focus of their point. Then, they can assert a racist argument without it being “about” race.

NEWSPAPER WOLFE

It is not a question of their superiority or inferiority to us, but solely one of racial, religious, political, and social differences that make it impossible for us to meet upon any ground of common understanding or occupy the same territory upon terms of political, social and economic equality.
NEWSPAPER ZOTIA
Pay attention to the slight of hand trick – an outright statement that the argument is not about white supremacy, followed directly by the assertion that whites and people of color cannot be equal. We can assume the author is not advocating for Japanese supremacy.

NEWSPAPER WOLFE
There is abundant room for her to expand on the Asiatic mainland, but no, the Japanese are not pioneers. What she wants is to enter upon and enjoy the fruits of the labors of others. She sees our Pacific coast as a fair and inviting land for her surplus peoples, where the hardships, toils, sacrifices and privations have all been done by our own people –

NEWSPAPER ZOTIA
Our own white people – remember, non-white immigrants are not part of us –

NEWSPAPER WOLFE
and where her people can come and enjoy this promised land, already prepared for them.

[Crackling again. Back to the present, masks off.]

MODERATOR
The date is [CURRENT DATE].

WOLFE
The fact of the matter is that immigration has always been, and will always be incredibly risky. I know that’s an unpopular opinion around these parts, but hear me out: imagine one-hundred Syrian refugees – and yes, obviously the real figures are much larger than that. But of those one-hundred refugees, let’s say just five percent, are not willing or able to assimilate to American
culture. Remember, this isn’t just hypothetical – there are often insurmountable cultural differences between the U.S. and the Middle East. So now we have these 5 Middle Easterners who have no place in our culture, and can’t return home. Now, of those five, let’s say that just one of the original hundred – is a Muslim, and is influenced by ISIS, either online or before they even arrive. Is that one terrorist on American soil worth the risk? I say no – even if it isn’t “PC”.

ZOTIA

Mr. Wolfe, not only have there been zero deaths on American soil which can be can be attributed to quote-unquote “radical Islamic terrorism” since 9/11, but you seem to have a poor grasp of the difference between an immigrant and a refugee. Incidentally, neither refugees – who are fleeing disaster – nor immigrants – who may simply want to live in a new location – are more dangerous than the general population. Indeed, they have been shown to be less violent, as well as less prone to breaking the law, than citizens born in the United States.

WOLFE

Those statistics are highly debatable, Ms. Zotia –

ZOTIA

No, actually, they’re not. Facts are not debatable, Mr. Wolfe. And it’s doctor Zotia, thank you very much.

MODERATOR

Excerpts from a thread of comments on Reddit’s R/AskTrumpSupporters. Original Post entitled, “PSA: Muslim Immigration Ban” The date is Tuesday, March 22nd, 2017.
This subreddit is to facilitate discussion between Trump supporters, and non-supporters. Both sides are moderated equally, and everyone with an open mind who participates in good faith is welcome. This subreddit is for serious discussion.

R/AskTrumpSupporters is intended to be a forum for supporters of Donald Trump to answer questions about current events. In practice, it’s often an echo chamber. This user has created a PSA on why Trump supporters are in favor of an outright ban on Muslim immigrants.

Original Poster: So you see, The overarching issue is NOT RELIGION but political with massive numbers wanting to change our government to Sharia law.

The sources that the original poster uses to back the “sharia law” claim are, to be frank, inaccurate to the point of irrelevance. However, the rhetoric remains powerful. Sharia law is seen as an actionable policy that immigrants are working to institute in America. To be clear: This is an outright fantasy.

First Commenter: I'm under the impression most Muslims have no distinction between politics and religion. Am I wrong?

Yes. This commenter is wrong. However, their incorrect opinion has now been broadcast and amplified by the nature of social media.
NEWSPAPER WOLFE

Second Commenter: You'd be right, in my experience. Religion is their law, and their law is Sharia. I'm from Belgium and in the past month I've been stabbed by muslims for not giving them my wallet, I've been shot at by muslims (albeit indirectly) when they opened fire on police officers with an AK47, and through a stroke of sheer luck I haven't been blown up by muslims when they blew up the airport I was supposed to take a day later. Needless to say I don't particularly trust them. They have no idea what a human life is, you are either a muslim or you are in their way. Laws do not apply to them.

NEWSPAPER ZOTIA

Moderator, can I get a refresher on the rules of this forum?

MODERATOR

One: Remain Civil.

Two: Post only in good faith.

Three: No memes–

NEWSPAPER ZOTIA

So. These unverifiable and nakedly bigoted statements are deemed civil, because it is not the content of your speech, but the way in which it is presented that defines civility and good faith.

WOLFE (Exiting mask)

Disagreement is no grounds for silencing. You believe in free speech, don’t you?

[The sound of dial-up again.]

MODERATOR

The date is [CURRENT DATE].
ZOTIA

Fact checking is not censorship, and it worries me immensely that you can obfuscate the two. If you cannot be bothered to make distinctions between fact and fiction, then I’m uncertain what value your stance could possibly hold.

WOLFE

Last time I checked, I was the one who makes a living off of his political stances. You can disagree with me all you want, but when you call my movement – my deepest values – worthless, that is when I have an issue. I will not be silenced.

ZOTIA

So I’m supposed to simply allow you to make these brazenly inaccurate generalizations unchallenged? You’ve been making assertion after assertion without any legitimate backing whatsoever.

WOLFE

You want to talk legitimacy? I can talk legitimacy: job-stealing illegal immigrants are not legitimate Americans. The fact is, Ms. Zotia, that I’m not alone in wanting my community to remain my community. And I think you should be very careful about assuming everyone with us tonight wants to be in your world. [Out to the audience] For the record: I’d like to welcome more of you to our side of the political spectrum.

MODERATOR

Perhaps it would be wise to move forward to our next question.

WOLFE / ZOTIA

No.
WOLFE

Look, I get it, alright? You think I’m some hick, some redneck idiot who’s never seen a ‘real immigrant’ in his life. But that’s not who I am. I’m educated, I have a real pride in not only myself, but my country, and goddamn it I’m trying to make the world a better place.

ZOTIA

By stopping families from escaping danger? Please.

WOLFE

I’m not some monster just because I don’t want illegal aliens in my neighborhood! I have a family. A little nephew, just eight years old. I don’t want him around criminals! I’ve got my own people to look after, and I’m not going to let this country be taken over by bad hombres who couldn’t keep their own countries stable.

[More radio tuning.]

MODERATOR

The date is May 13th, 2005. High school students attending the Urban School of San Francisco interview a surviving Japanese-American woman concerning her experiences with Japanese Internment. Excerpt from an Oral History from Rose Nieda.

[A/V from a surviving interview with a Japanese American who lived through the camps. Masks on to observe.]

[ROSE]

[I think we had an emperor’s picture up on the wall. I think she took that down and destroyed it. I think that’s about the only thing we had. Of course, later on we had to turn in all dangerous items like cameras and short-wave radios. I had a 22 rifle—I had to turn that in. I never reclaimed them]
because after all these years, there was a little slip—one inch by half an inch—and I don't know where it went. It ended up in Washington D.C. CPC, which is Civilian Property Custodian, but I never retrieved my items.]

[What did you have the gun for?]

[I loved to shoot cans. We were out in the country. Not for hunting.]

[Not for protective reasons?]

[No, I thought it was kind of cool to shoot a 22. I was sort of a tom-boy.]

[Rose stays on screen throughout the following section. Only ZOTIA removes her mask.]

Mmoderator

The date is still [CURRENT DATE].

Zotia

I am afraid, Mr. Wolfe, that I cannot pretend to be partial on this issue. My grandfather – A Jewish man – fled Poland during Nazi occupation, and you are going to tell me that foreigners are inherently dangerous? You are using the exact – exact – rhetoric used to instate fascist governments and scapegoat innocent people. And, may I add, my grandfather wasn’t even welcome here. He had to sneak in to escape Nazi persecution. He was, by your verbiage, an illegal.

[Rose]

[When did you hear you were going to be evacuated?]
[ROSE] (Cont.)

[I don’t know, I think it was in late December or so or maybe January, it was getting serious, because they had all the isseis register as enemy aliens, and I was one of the people that did that, because I was an American citizen. I didn’t think I would be evacuated, but that’s the way it went. And I also protested the evacuation, but that didn’t do any good. And then the Japanese American Citizens league said ‘cooperate’, so we all cooperated more or less.]

[Did you ever consider leaving even though your parents didn't want you to?]

[No. I give talks in high school and they say, "Why didn't you say, 'No I'm not going. Run over me, I don't care?'" In those days we just didn't do that.]

[Why not?]

[I don't know. We were so afraid and fearful. After a while, it was Japan that attacked the United States. It was a sneak attack, they called it, and then the papers were playing it up—the "Yellow Peril" and all that bit. We were afraid for our lives; we didn't know what our neighbors were going to do to us. And people would say, "It's for your own protection that we should send you to camp." Which, I thought, that's true too because they would throw rocks in the windows and you don't know how people would react. It's a crisis and I'm sure when they struck the World Trade Center a lot of people felt that way about Muslims, or whoever was responsible. I think they figured we were one of those.]

[Static as ROSE fades out]

WOLFE

Don’t you think it is worth noting, though, that the U.S. won the second World War while instituting a policy of extreme vetting? We turned away many refugees, and we won that war.
WOLFE (Cont.)

We instituted Japanese internment, and *we won that war*. If a few Jews had to deal with their own problems, then so be it.

[ZOTIA is briefly stunned into silence]

ZOTIA

Mr. Wolfe, I will not allow you the pleasure of provoking me. I cannot – *will not* – allow all these people to leave here thinking that immigrants are dangerous, violent people. *Regardless* of what you believe about “national security”.

WOLFE

This isn’t about belief, it’s about safety!

ZOTIA

It’s always about belief with you and your type. I could spend all night citing verifiable statistics and historical precedents, giving you fact after fact after fact, and absolutely none of it would affect you! And do you know why?

WOLFE (Sarcastically)

Please, enlighten me.

ZOTIA

Because you’re willingly ignorant. Because I could provide you with thousands of examples of practicing Muslims, of Mexican immigrants, living good, wholesome lives, and you would always be able to shrug it off in favor of your own *absurd white supremacist power fantasy*!
WOLFE

Alright, I think that’s enough. You are completely out of control. I thought I was here tonight to
have a reasonable conversation with one of the so-called enlightened liberal elite, and all you’ve
got is bad insults? You’re pathetic. You and all your people.

[A sudden interruption of Morse code]

MODERATOR

Excerpts from Executive Order 9066, which allowed for the establishment of Japanese prison
 camps during World War Two.

NEWSPAPER WOLFE [Reading from a large piece of paper or scroll]

Authorizing the Secretary of War to Prescribe Military Areas:

NEWSPAPER ZOTIA (Translating)

Fair warning: this document was written to be dry. Sterile. Not about race.

NEWSPAPER WOLFE

Whereas the successful prosecution of the war requires every possible protection against
 espionage and against sabotage to national-defense material, national-defense premises, and
 national-defense utilities as defined in Section 4, Act of April 20, 1918, etc. etc…

NEWSPAPER ZOTIA

In brief: in order to win the war against the Japanese, we needed to do whatever is necessary to
 stop the flow of information to Japan. The subtext here is that Japanese Americans must be
 thought of as saboteurs.

NEWSPAPER WOLFE

Now, therefore, by virtue of the authority vested in me as President of the United States, I hereby
 authorize and direct the Secretary of War, whenever he deems such action necessary or
desirable, to prescribe military areas in such places and of such extent as he may determine, from which any or all persons may be excluded, and with respect to which, the right of any person to enter, remain in, or leave shall be subject to whatever restrictions the Secretary of War may impose in his discretion.

NEWSPAPER ZOTIA

The Secretary of War - Henry L. Stimson, whose counsel was key to Roosevelt’s decision to enact this order - now had the ability to set up military-controlled camps along the West Coast. They would be allowed to put whomever they liked into these camps, for whatever period of time they feel is necessary. Or, if not necessary, at least desirable. As it turns out, they felt it desirable to select only Japanese immigrants.

NEWSPAPER WOLFE

I hereby further authorize and direct the Secretary of War to take such other steps as he or the appropriate Military Commander may deem advisable to enforce compliance with the restrictions applicable to each Military area hereinabove authorized to be designated, including the use of Federal troops and other Federal Agencies.

Signed, Franklin D. Roosevelt

The White House,

February 19, 1942.

NEWSPAPER ZOTIA

The Secretary of War and his commanding officers got to decide how the rules of the camps were to be enforced - rules that they made. They used federal resources to do so, including
Federal Troops. But hey – we were at war, right? Never could trust the Japanese. It’s not about race, it’s about the war. It’s about assimilation. It’s about our safety.

[Rapid tuning]

MODERATOR


[A/V from CSPAN coverage begins.

WOLFE lip-syncs Trump’s words when indicated as NEWSPAPER WOLFE]

NEWSPAPER WOLFE

[I have to say, though, the world is such a different place, even from when I started with this.]

NEWSPAPER ZOTIA

Before the election, Donald Trump speaks at an interfaith conference in D.C. The crowd is largely conservative, and friendly to Trump’s platform.

NEWSPAPER WOLFE

[We started twelve months ago and, coming up, I just see where in France they have a massive soccer tournament, something that's so important and so big, and they're thinking about maybe postponing it or canceling it because of threats and all the problems going on with what's happening with terrorism. And it's a very, very sad thing and a very sad place.]

NEWSPAPER ZOTIA

No one talks quite like the Don. Despite the jokes at his expense, Donald Trump is an effective speaker – and he has a good ear for rhetoric. Terrorism is one of his go-to talking points, an appeal to fear and the need to feel secure.
[And who would have ever thought our world would be in a position like this, where that would happen. But you just see event after event, radical Islamic terrorism is just, you know, taking over and we can't let that happen. We cannot let that happen.]

There is a smattering of applause. Evidently Islam is not well represented at the Faith and Freedom Coalition.

[And if we're smart and if we're tough, we won't let it happen. Just remember that.]

There is a certain machismo to Trump’s approach to the hypothetical threat of Islam. He intends to be reassuring. But to whom?

[All of us need to confront together the threat of radical Islam. We have to do it. Now, Hillary Clinton, or as I call her, Crooked Hillary Clinton...]

This is Trump’s other successful tactic: do whatever you need to do to make sure people vote against something that isn’t you. If it isn’t Islam, maybe it’s your opponent. Maybe you can delegitimize the Secretary of State to the point where she too is a thing to be feared.

[... she's as crooked as they come -- refuses to even say the words "radical Islam" -- refuses to say the words. This alone makes her unfit to be president. In fact...]
Of course, why use one tactic when you can use both?

[... in fact, she wants a 500 percent increase in Syrian refugees to come in to our country. No good. No good. No good. Can't do it. We don't know where they come from, where they are.]

But here, something different. There’s booing. Jeering, something stirring in people watching. It becomes clear where and why the booing has started. A single woman has risen in protest. She’s not being picked up clearly by the mics, but she seems to be chanting something.

Trump is silent, the cameras now trained on this lone interrupter.

She’s grabbed, by two large men in suits – not violently, but it is clear their grasp is firm. She struggles to hold a peace sign in the air. She is not something that Trump planned for.

The media tries to shift their focus to the lone woman. News crews train their microphones away from Donald Trump and towards this unknown interloper.

But it’s too loud in the room. The people around her are angry. The woman is chanting something, but what?

Finally, the media is able to pick up her act of protest in full. She keeps chanting as she is pulled away, back towards the exit.
NEWSPAPER ZOTIA

“Refugees are welcome here.” That’s her extreme, leftist stance at an interfaith conference – to assert that scared, battered people can come to America and be welcomed, rather than jailed and beaten.

NEWSPAPER WOLFE

The crowd is roiling against her. The audience prepares to fire back. Someone decides to begin a counter-chant, a mantra to drown out her stance: U.S.A. U.S.A! [U.S.A! U.S.A. U.S.A!]

[WOLFE is subsumed by audio of the audience. It loops.]

NEWSPAPER ZOTIA

This moment is significant in that it proves, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that Donald Trump was successful in tapping into the powerful vein of xenophobia which lives on as a through-line in American history. He positioned Syrian refugees and Mexican immigrants as antithetical to the safety of the United States, and then he ascended to the Presidency. This is not new. In America, this was never new. People who are willing to dehumanize and other vulnerable populations gain power, and they do so without remorse. And they will do so again, and again, and again.

MODERATOR

So what happens now?

NEWSPAPER ZOTIA

That’s not up to me. [Taking her mask off] We’ve run out of history.

[Tuning. Back to the present.]

MODERATOR

The date is [CURRENT DATE]
ZOTIA

Me and my people? [beat] I should never have come here. This is a lose-lose situation: stay and get berated or leave and be mocked. I’ve dedicated years of my life to the scholarly pursuit of research and documentation, whereas you have – what – a bachelor’s degree in Economics and a chip on your shoulder?

WOLFE

How dare you? I resent th–

ZOTIA

Oh, save it for your mediocre podcast. Let’s cut our losses and call it a night, shall we?

[ZOTIA prepares to leave]

MODERATOR

I’m afraid I’m not willing to end this forum early, Dr. Zotia. We are being broadcast live.

ZOTIA

Come on, we both know that it’s ridiculous that we are being presented as equals. All this man has to do is maintain the illusion of expertise and he gets to spew talking points all night long. Sure, most of us will see through the lies, but there’s a good chance that at least a few people won’t. And those people will go home tonight, find Wolfe’s media, and be indoctrinated into what is, essentially, a rebranded Kl Klux Klan. So I really think it’s time to end this mess.

WOLFE

So go. All you’re doing right now is wasting everybody’s time.
ZOTIA
You’d like that, wouldn’t you! And when I’m gone, you’ll to cite that as evidence that academics and leftists aren’t ‘brave enough’ to engage with your ideology. I never had a chance, did I? This was never about reasoned debate. I’ve been conned into becoming a tool for recruitment. Well,

ZOTIA (Cont.)
I’m done being used. I’m taking control of this situation, we’re taking control of this situation. I’d like to propose a vote amongst those in attendance tonight.

WOLFE
What is happening?

ZOTIA
It’s pretty simple – see if you can keep up. If I can’t end this debate, then I’ve only got two options: stay here or leave. Neither is ideal. If I stay, then Mr. Wolfe gets to look like my equal. By ignoring my reasoned points, and staying cordial, he and his movement get that much closer to the mainstream. Of course, if I leave, then he has a live microphone with which to amplify his hatred and bigotry. So yes – I think I need help making this decision. Help from everyone here.

MODERATOR
This is highly unorthodox.

WOLFE
This is absurd! Do I not get a say in this?

ZOTIA
You get one vote, just like everyone else. I’ll even break a tie if I need to. We’re going to do a show of hands. Stay, or go. Is everyone clear on this?.
WOLFE

Alright. Fine then. Let’s do it. For the record, I think this is ridiculous.

MODERATOR

I’m giving this 20 seconds, maximum. Please discuss with your neighbors now.

[Time out ~20 seconds.]

MODERATOR

Let’s keep this moving along. Everyone please finish your conversations and get ready to vote.

[When quiet, or if more than 3 seconds] The options are, again, either Dr. Zotia stays or leaves.

She claims that staying would lend Mr. Wolfe a false legitimacy, and that leaving would allow Mr. Wolfe an uncontested platform. We will now tally votes by a show of hands. All those in favor of Dr. Zotia staying. [Waits for a thumbs up from the ushers] All those in favor of Dr. Zotia leaving. [Again, a thumbs up] [Tally is taken, then results are handed to MODERATOR onstage – as quickly as possible].

WOLFE

For the record, I’d like to point out that this is a great example of how liberal America changes the rules whenever they’re afraid they’re going to lose. I hope you know just how stupid you look. How stupid you look to everyone here, and everyone watching.

[At this point, script splits into two alternate ending conditions. If the audience votes LEAVE, keep reading from this point. If the audience votes STAY, skip to page 61]

MODERATOR

The votes have been tallied. Dr. Zotia will be leaving the debate.
ZOTIA

Thank you. And thank you all for having me. I don’t know what will conspire here once I’ve gone, but my let my closing remarks consist of this warning: he will lie. And he will stretch truths. And he will try to make you fear people you have never met. And you don’t have to hate him for that – you just have to disagree and empathize. Good luck.

[Exit ZOTIA]

WOLFE

I have to say, I’m a little stunned. I’m used to being disrespected by the so-called tolerant left, but I’ve never seen someone throw a hissy fit like this one. Now, that being said – I agree with the popular consensus. It was Ms. Zotia’s time to leave. What has happened here tonight is really representative of a much broader trend in America, and so I would like to take this opportunity to reach out to those of you in the audience who may be interested in learning more about the Alt-Right movement. A good starting point for many is—

MODERATOR

Mr. Wolfe, I would prefer that we return to our intended conversation.

WOLFE

Sure, let me just finish my thought. So what you’ll want to Google is—

MODERATOR

Let me re-phrase. I am done with off-topic diversions. We have wasted too much time as it is.

WOLFE

Fine! Fine. What was the question again?
MODERATOR

The question was, what role should immigration play in contemporary America?

WOLFE [Almost giddy – this has been a long night]

Right! So it’s like I’ve been trying to say all night. We really can’t trust most of the people who are trying to get into our country. They’re not like us, they’re usually extremist Muslims or Mexican illegals who are capable of some really bad shit. If you’re not terrified of what’s happening right now in America – hell, in Vermont –, you’re not paying enough attention. And look, I know a lot of you are sympathetic to these folks, but we have to look after ourselves first. We need to bring back the idea of America – and Americans – first. I guess my point is that if you’re scared of what’s happening in the world right now, there’s a damn good reason for that. I’m scared too. But the white race doesn’t have to live in fear. If you just knew what I know, you wouldn’t be confused anymore. I’ve never felt more secure in myself than when I joined the Alt-Right. Because I know that the U.S. is our country. Not anyone else’s. So to hell with so-called multiculturalism! We won’t be silenced, and we won’t be stopped – not by the illegals, not by the anifa thugs, not by the Jews, and certainly not by some mixed-race bitch who doesn’t know her place! America first, heil Trump, and God bless you all.

[End play]
MODERATOR

The votes have been tallied. Dr. Zotia will remain here. I would like to remind our participants that we are running incredibly low on time.

ZOTIA

So be it. Let it be known that I do not concede any equivalence of legitimacy between this man and myself.

WOLFE

This is unbelievable! I’ve never felt so disrespected in my life, and I’ve had people protest me in the streets.

MODERATOR

Can we – please – answer our first question? What role should immigration play in contemporary America?

[Beat]

ZOTIA

Well Mr. Wolfe? What does the modern fascist have to say about the role of immigration in America?

WOLFE [Breaking]

You know what? I’m done screwing around. You want to know what I think about immigration? I think it should cease, with the possible – possible – exception of major European powers. Outright! You may not be a race realist, “Doctor”, but I am, and the fact – the fact is that non-white peoples have no right coming into our nation and laying claim to our resources. This country was built by white people, for white people, and there’s no getting around that. We need to be hard-line isolationists, we need get these Jews out of office, and we need stop this prissy
WOLFE (Cont.)
Amnesty bullshit. We need to get illegals out. White Christians are being discriminated against, and I'm not going to sit idly by and watch my people be oppressed. This country is being Feminized, there is a white genocide, and we cannot, cannot, cannot tolerate foreign Muslims terrorists invading our lands! That is what I think the “role of immigration” should be. Any further questions?

ZOTIA
No, I think you’ve made yourself abundantly clear, Mr. Wolfe. I do want to thank you for dropping the diplomatic tone, though. This is far more in-line with what I’ve seen of you in your media. Would you be interested in hearing what I think?

WOLFE
Don’t talk down to me.

ZOTIA
I think that you’ve got a real problem with empathy. I think that you have bought fully into the imperialist white supremacist heteropatriarchy and I think that probably feels good. I think the world probably makes more sense to you than it does to me, because I don’t get to do that, Mr. Wolfe. Queer folks, people of color, and members of persecuted religions don’t get to escape like you do. And I think you’re too willingly ignorant to give a damn about that.

WOLFE
I’m not a child, Ms. Zotia.

MODERATOR
That’s enough, let’s please get to closing statements.
ZOTIA

An adult, Mr. Wolfe, wouldn’t be afraid of people who don’t look like him.

WOLFE

I am *not* afraid of you. *You* should be afraid of *me*. I’ve got lots of friends up here who might want to pay you a visit one of these days. Maybe do some debating of their own. How do you feel about gun rights?

MODERATOR

That’s enough.

ZOTIA

Is that a threat?

MODERATOR

I said *that’s enough*. It is my duty as Moderator to end this discussion, as civility is evidently off the table. Mr. Wolfe, you have ten seconds for closing remarks.

WOLFE


MODERATOR

*Leave*, Mr. Wolfe.

[Exit WOLFE]

MODERATOR

… Dr. Zotia? You may have your closing remarks.
The only thing I have to say is that I’m sorry. I’m sorry for allowing this man to stand at a
podium next to me and spout vitriol for so long. Please, stand up for our immigrants. Don’t let
this go unchallenged. God help us.

[Exit ZOTIA]

[End play]
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