

Middleton Heights is not an autobiographical play. Its characters and scenes are crafted for theatrical effect. That said, the play is heavily informed by historical events, translated through the lens of having been raised in a Midwestern suburb of Cleveland, Ohio, at a time when I was unaware of the existence of any other people of color in the neighborhood. The identifier “person of color” was not in common parlance back then. Rather, our neighbors were identified by their ethnic backgrounds and the occupation of the head of household: the German construction man and his family next door, the Greek tailor and his wife on the other side, the Irish plumber and his family a few doors down. Against this backdrop, our identity as Filipinos was secondary to the acknowledgment that both my parents were physicians: their occupation seemed to serve as a shorthand for their moral integrity and a key to our family being welcomed with open arms as members of our community.

This idyllic environment of childhood memory stands in contrast to what I only fully comprehended in adulthood as an ongoing undercurrent of strained race relations associated with Cleveland, and which manifested to my family with our arrival in the city during the summer of the Hough riots in 1966 to the protests in the aftermath of the killing of Tamir Rice in 2014, the time span of this piece.

In contemplating the many reasons why my parents – and many immigrants – choose to leave their native homeland and make America their home, I was reminded of the voices of relatives and family friends who were both very proud to be making a life for themselves in the United States and yet pined for the sense of family, tradition, and belonging they associated with their native land, in this family’s case, the Philippines.

In the same way that languages, like Icelandic – whose roots can be traced back to the oldest Nordic language spoken in Scandinavia between 200 and 800 AD – are frozen in time by its outlier speakers, so too, the American Dream seems to take sturdier root when the seeds are planted abroad in the imagination of immigrants coming to America. For those like my parents who had to earn their US citizenship, the promises of their chosen land of opportunity seem tantalizingly attainable with hard work, a can-do attitude, and a lot of faith, and in many instances, The Dream can and does become reality.

However, there is also another reality, one described by the sociologist, Lauren Berlant, in her book, *Cruel Optimism*, a state in which something you desire – an object, a lifestyle, a belief – becomes an obstacle to your ability to flourish. For some, the persistence of the simple formula of attaining the American Dream can shutter one’s eyes to the realities of intersectional and structural racism, misogyny, and classism. This is the inchoate push and pull of the seemingly insignificant patter among DAD, MOM, MOE, and MEENA, a meditation on how this family, neither Crazy Rich Asians, nor the subjects of what has been labeled “poverty porn” in depictions of brown people in popular Western Culture, are in their way, an anachronistic embodiment of The American Dream, living as they do in Middleton Heights.

I wish to thank Brian Boruta, Stewart Ikeda, and the production team of The Umbrella Stage Company for entrusting me with their (and my!) first commissioned work of a full-length play. I cannot thank Michelle Aguillon enough not only for her brilliant work as a director, but for being a mentor, a sister, and a friend, and who made this production possible by introducing me to Brian Boruta and The Umbrella. I am thankful for the supportive community of playwrights and theater artists who are members of the Asian American Playwright Collective (AAPC), the Asian American Theatre Artists of Boston (AATAB) and the United Asian American Pacific Islander (UAAPI) Artists who have nurtured and enriched my work by encouraging me embrace my Filipino American identity; to Michael J. Bobbitt and the Mass Cultural Council for enabling the work of artists by providing financial support in the form of grants and awards; and to Kate Snodgrass and the Boston Playwrights’ Theatre for helping me sustain the dream of being a playwright by producing the Boston Theater Marathon and enabling me and other perpetually “emerging” playwrights to see their short plays fully produced by members of our thriving Boston theater community while at the same time raising awareness and resources for the Theatre Community Benevolent Fund.

Finally, thank you to my family, who have been a constant source of enlightening discussions, comic relief, dramatic insight, and a lifetime of love. To my father, may he rest in peace: ayayaten ka.

- Hortense Gerardo, **Playwright**