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Generations Apart: Exploring The Generation Gap in Theatre

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GENERATIONS APART:
EXPLORING THE GENERATION GAP IN THEATRE

A Thesis

by

JESUS BRIONES

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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GENERATIONS APART:
EXPLORING THE GENERATION GAP IN THEATRE

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JESUS BRIONES

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December 2013

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis attempts to find relationships among three different ethnic groups (Jewish, Chinese, and Italian) presented in the following plays. First, there is an explanation of four different types of generation gaps that are discovered throughout the first play of examination, *Fiddler on the Roof*. There is a *technology gap*, a *cultural gap*, a *religion gap*, and an *assimilation gap*.

Each of these gaps is present within *Fiddler on the Roof* and is varied throughout the remaining plays examined (*Flower Drum Song* and *Over the River and Through the Woods*). Each “gap” will be given an explanation and how it is considered a sub-group to the “generation gap.” The first two plays are musicals and the last one is a straight play. Thus, each play is not separated into two musicals and a straight play, but rather a *musical drama*, a *musical comedy*, and a *straight play*.

DEDICATION

This thesis could not have been completed without the support of my loving wife, Emily Ruby Fierros-Briones. She has been my source of inspiration that has helped me immensely throughout this process. Additional thanks are given to my parents, Antonio and Yolanda Briones. Their support and understanding has truly made me realize that determination is essential to all of my accomplishments. My in-laws have also been a big part of my life now which I cherish greatly. Finally, but certainly not least, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my grandmother, Maria Rubalcaba. Thank you so much to everybody who has helped me throughout this long journey that will never be forgotten.

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Dr. Brian Warren is absolutely one of the most respected professors at the University of Texas Pan American. I am greatly appreciative of all the knowledge I have gained from him and consider him a friend as well as my Committee Chair. There was never a question as to whom I wanted to serve on my committee. I feel extremely fortunate that Dr. Marian Monta has served as my committee member. She has helped inspire and persuade me that this thesis would be an insightful and valid contribution to the field of theatre. I will forever be grateful to Dr. Monta for her wisdom and advice that has aided me in completing this thesis. I also greatly thank Tom Grabowski for agreeing to be part of my committee. I have certainly learned so much from Tom throughout my college career. One last mention is needed to Dr. Jack Stanley. Even though he has moved away, I greatly appreciate and value everything he has taught me throughout my academic journey.

Thanks are equally given to my supervisor and colleague at the University Theatre Box Office, Mrs. Elva Galvan. It is also fitting to acknowledge my co-workers that have been with me throughout this educational process, Joe, Gibby, George, Hernan, Mike, Gloria, Silvia, Fabiola, David, and Alondra. Thank you all for your assistance and friendship.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an examination of how generation gaps have changed over the course of many decades as illustrated through their reflection in American theatre. The plays analyzed in this thesis are *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Flower Drum Song*, and *Over the River and Through the Woods*. An examination of these plays will show that each contain characteristics similar to each other that deal with families. Additionally, evidence will suggest that certain family characteristics have changed over the course of different generations. With each play encompassing a broad time period, connections will be made as to how cultural characteristics may or may not have changed. A synopsis of each play will be included for reference throughout each chapter.

First, a *technology gap* will be discussed to provide support that the development of technology has happened so fast that the next generation will undoubtedly be affected. Second, a *philosophical gap* is explored to provide support on generational changes on how one's generation adopts new values and ideas that the older generation opposes. Thirdly, a *religious or moral gap* is mentioned to discuss how one generation accepts ideas that are totally condemned by the established generation. Finally, an *assimilation gap* is discussed which represents how children raised in a new culture become assimilated and soon forget those traditional values and customs of the generation from which they came. *Fiddler on the Roof* is the first play discussed, with special attention to the play's four different "generation gaps" presented

throughout the play. Each of these “gaps” will be discussed and applied to each of the daughter characters in *Fiddler on the Roof*. This play works perfectly as a first example of the “generation gap” because the plot so greatly challenges the main character’s traditional values, which he so greatly cherishes.

In *Flower Drum Song*, the “*assimilation gap*” will be the most apparent for discussion. This play will examine the Chinese Americans and their characteristics of the “generation gap.” It is important to mention this to provide evidence of possible similarities between the two races and their religion. Even though there will be similarities discussed, there will also be different scenarios that provide a different perspective on the previous “generation gaps” mentioned in *Fiddler on the Roof*. Even though the “*assimilation gap*” will be the most apparent difference the play, other examples will show how similar the Chinese Americans may be compared to the Jewish culture. The Chinese are another great example for this examination because their status in the United States was that of a difficult one, which challenged them to hold on to their cultural values.

In the following chapter, the play *Over the River and Through the Woods* covers another race as reflected in theatre. Again, a comparison will be made by using the four different types of “generation gaps” that were explored in *Fiddler on the Roof*. Different scenarios will show how the characteristics of the two previous plays connect to the “generation gap.” Additionally, an examination of this play will show how older generations have fewer “gaps” because of the ages of the characters. Again, this play also works as a great example for this study because the values that the characters hold on to very much affect the decisions and attitudes of others that struggle with the “generation gap.”

In each chapter, a different race or culture will be discussed to show the similarities in each of them. All races think that they are so much more different from every other, yet, this examination will show how similar races are to each other. There are only three different plays discussed in this thesis, but it is possible to expand this research to find other connections between ethnic groups. This thesis will show how each “generation gap” can affect these different races in different ways, yet they are universal. By taking this approach, one could examine a different set of plays and possibly discover similar patterns that are presented here. Theatre is the tool by which human life is projected. Since culture is one of the primary ways identity is established, examining each of these plays is important to the reader because it is a way for us to reflect on how similar all people are connected. Each of these plays represents a solid example of three different cultures that can be viewed as completely diverse, yet similar. Because of the time period that these three plays were written, it may also be possible to find connections based on the years that are in question.

Statement of the Problem

Because of the changing times, this “generation gap” not only has an effect on Americans, but also how playwrights have constructed some of theatre’s most important works. So many different ethnic groups founded America, and it is clear that so much diversity may have even had an effect on each other. An interesting connection lies between each of the plays discussed here where one could view *Fiddler on the Roof*, for example, and another ethnic group might find a similar connection. Or perhaps it is a coincidence that when a playwright writes about families, so many of these obstacles are present?

Hypothesis

By examining the relationship between families of different cultures, one conclusion possible is the revelation of how similar ethnic groups can be to one another. If this hypothesis is correct, readers will be able to conclude that our human interaction with one another is universally reflected through the plays examined. Because of the diversity that so greatly characterizes the United States, there are no shortages of playwrights that can be examined through this theory. Through thorough research and strong evidence, there may still be room for more research by applying this idea to other plays and discovering that there is no coincidence that links different cultures together.

CHAPTER II

FIDDLER ON THE ROOF

Russian Jews are the focused group presented in the musical play *Fiddler on the Roof*. I write “Jews” because people of the Jewish community typically refer to their religious affiliation, not necessarily their culture. There is a fine line between what is considered culture and what falls under religious customs. Ultimately, I believe family ideologies are what distinguish people in certain ethnic groups, not necessarily religion. “We incorporate religion’s dynamic nature by taking a life course perspective where religious affiliation, practice, or importance, or all, might change at any point in time but are connected to previous religiosity and other life events.” (Web, pg. 1228) In *Fiddler on the Roof*, the opening song, *Tradition*, refers to all the ideals and behaviors that have been passed down through the generations. Tradition is defined as “the transmission of customs or beliefs from generation to generation, or the fact of being passed on in this way.” (Web, Jan. 21, 2013) The song, *Tradition*, is about a routine that has been established and it is something that is comfortable for all Jews to accept and practice regularly. However, change is inevitable in any culture and it is no different for Tevye and his daughters.

“...One striking fact emerges: almost the entire Jewish population in the world now lives in different countries than formerly, or under altered economic, political and cultural conditions.

Beginning in the eighties of the past century, when the “storms in the South” (the pogroms in southern Czarist Russia) gathered and

broke, and until the middle fifties in our country, some 5,250,000 Jews migrated from one country to another. This migration laid the foundations in the United States for what has become the largest Jewish community in history, and led to the transition of about one-half of the world Jewish population to the Western Hemisphere (Davis, pg. 5).

Because of such inevitable change that has occurred throughout history, Tevye and his family are a prime example of the families that would make up America in the coming years. This is significant because the Jews were not the only group to come to America. Many more ethnic groups would also find their way to America for similar reasons. The following chapters will provide more evidence on other groups settling in the United States.

“By the sixteenth century, most Jews in Western Europe had been forcibly deprived of their ancestral faith and identity; ... In Central Europe many had been killed or expelled from their homes, and some had migrated eastward, beyond the Oder River, into towns, villages, and hamlets sprawling Poland. The Thirty Years’ War, which wracked the Germanies during the 1600s, brought the East Europeans additional emigres, but in 1648, when that tragic struggle came to an end, new conflicts beginning with the revolt of the Cossacks-broke out in the Slavic lands.” (Marcus, pg. 75)

While the “Thirty Year’s War” did not play a significant role in *Fiddler on the Roof*, Marcus describes there to be a possible foreshadowing of the coming change in Russia.

“From 1920 to 1960, migration occurred primarily from one European country to another or from European countries to the United States. By contrast, since 1960 there has been a rapid growth of movement from developing countries and former colonies to Europe and North America, and to neighboring countries that provide economic opportunity or refuge from war (Neilson 2003).”

The song, *Tradition*, explains how there is a role for the men, women, and children in Anatevka. The fathers are meant to work all day, provide for his family, say the prayers, and are ultimately the masters of the houses. The mamas are to raise the children, cook, clean, and provide a suitable home for the papas when they come home. The sons are enrolled in Hebrew school, learn trade, and are chosen as husbands. The daughters are taught to mend, fix, and prepare to marry anyone their father chooses for them.

“Relations of wealth and poverty are now distributed across the globe, both within countries and between them. The rapidly increasing volume of consumer goods also contributes to this new geography of wealth by creating consumer-driven enclaves surrounded by people for whom these goods and the lifestyles they represent are increasingly hard to obtain (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Liechty 2003).”

These practices may be used today in much smaller numbers, but in general, this is a way of life that does not exist anymore. Generations continue to change - perhaps even more rapidly than in previous generations. It seems as if technology is moving forward at such a rapid pace

that every five to seven years there are significant changes in a generation's way of life and culture. For example, with the invention of cell phones, computer laptops, and electronic tablets, children are now growing up with many more communication devices than before, which affects how and when family members interact.

“Writing on globalization consistently focuses on state and market mechanisms as well as new technologies. For example, sociologists, economists, and geographers examine the ways in which a combination of new information technologies and laws regulating the movement of capital around the world have contributed to the decline of Fordist models of production, localized and under centralized control, and the emergence of flexibility, dispersal, and shifting sites (Harvey 1989; Johnston, Taylor, and Watts 2002; Sassen 1998).”

This evidence would suggest that new technology can have a significant effect on businesses. A transition to new technology can sometimes be difficult, even for businesses that adopt technology early on. With technology advancing so rapidly, there is perhaps little time for the past generations, our parents and grandparents, to adjust to such a drastic change in tradition. In *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye is oblivious as to why there is a reason for a particular tradition, but that doesn't affect his respect for particular traditions. Tevye says,

“Here in Anatevka we have traditions for everything-how to eat, how to sleep, how to wear clothes. For instance, we always keep our heads covered and always wear a little prayer shawl. This shows our constant devotion to God. You may ask, how did this

tradition start? I'll tell you-I don't know! But it's a tradition.

Because of our traditions, everyone knows who he is and what God expects him to do.” (pg. 1, Stein)

Religion will often play a very significant role within a culture. Tevye says he does not understand why they do certain things, but that is how it has been done for a long time. It is often the case for children to be raised to follow certain traditions within a family. For example, one American tradition that many families practice is going to a restaurant after church. Large families will call in a reservation to a restaurant and have a table set up for ten to twenty people on Sundays. Or perhaps it is a homemade dinner at a relative's house. Either way, traditions today are still preserved and cherished because it is important for families to continue values that they find important. *Fiddler on the Roof* certainly demonstrates how family traditions are important, even in today's society.

Mexican-Americans follow similar family traditions. It is relevant to mention Mexican Americans as an example here because this is a group which closely relates to all the other groups discussed. For example, it is traditional to make tamales on Christmas Eve. Writing as a Mexican-American, my personal experience of this tradition has allowed me to understand that this particular tradition is current as of today. It is not known exactly how this tradition got started, but it is still practiced today, even if it is not understood why. So while Jews and Mexican Americans have very noticeable differences in their traditions, they each have traditions nonetheless which families have preserved. Some family members cherish certain traditions so much because it is a way for them to bond with each other. Not everyone has the opportunity to stay close to family members, and everyone perhaps does it differently. However different ethnic groups are, traditions play an important role in family ideologies.

The emergence of the sewing machine in *Fiddler on the Roof* also brings up another part of tradition that disturbs the waters in Tevye's world. Motel, the local tailor, has arranged for himself to be a suitor for Tzeitel, Tevye's eldest daughter. Motel approaches Tevye with the proposition to marry his daughter, but Tevye is unhappy with Motel's idea of making himself the matchmaker. In *Fiddler on the Roof*, it is customary for a "matchmaker" to arrange a marriage and for the parents from both families to approve of the courtship. Motel has taken it upon himself to ask for Tzeitel's hand in marriage directly, which is completely untraditional. Motel has also tried to bring peace of mind to Tevye by explaining that he has plans to buy a sewing machine. This wonderful new machine will make it easier for him to make money. Tevye objects to Motel's proposition because he is a poor tailor. Tevye would like for his daughter to have a husband who will take care of her. Tevye is also uneasy about this infusion of modern technology, which will be another break from tradition. Motel argues that they will be happy and he will take good care of Tzeitel.

First of all, having a sewing machine adds to the emergence of technology within the town of Anatevka and the town will adapt to more changes. It is change, perhaps, that troubles the people of Anatevka. The townspeople are completely fixated on tradition because it is what has become familiar. The only difference between Tevye's family and the rest of the town might only be the level of anxiety that may come from people coping with change.

"Though people share cultural values, the way they interpret those values and the degree to which they act on them differ. In addition, the role individuals play influence the way they interpret the introduction of new ideas and technologies." (pg. 104, Roney)

With new technology emerging constantly, it is naive to assume traditions and cultures will remain constant. But is this rapid change in technology necessarily problematic? Basically, all new technology that is invented is intended to make tasks more manageable, faster, and easier. Today, we many of us have cell phones, which have provided drastic changes in the way we communicate with each other. The Internet has provided a way for humans to communicate differently with each other and provide vast amounts of information. Even food acquisition, in the United States has become faster. People can get entire meals within minutes and at inexpensive prices. It seems as if everyone is trying to get to where they need to be at a much faster pace. This rapid change in technology is possibly what Tevye fears the most. It is the tradition that Tevye holds on to, as it is stated in the opening song, *Tradition*. In the dialogue prior to the start of the song *Tradition*, Tevye states, “How do we keep our balance (the fiddler)? I can say in one word, tradition!” (Bock, Stein, Harnick, pg. 1)

Tevye’s other daughter Hodel is a different example of how the “generation gap” has affected Tevye’s family differently. Perchik is the wanderer who has found refuge in Tevye’s home by tutoring his youngest daughters. His ideas are radical and some may even consider him dangerous. However, Hodel finds him charming because of his ability to persuade her into thinking as he does, such as practices in large cities on dancing.

When Hodel and Perchik first talk, there is hostility between them, because Hodel is convinced that Perchik’s ways are too radical and eccentric for her and how she has been raised. She thinks that her traditional ways are proper and his philosophies are too deep to fathom. Perchik’s defense is that times are changing everywhere except for Anatevka. He even goes so far as to demonstrate that boys and girls are free to dance together in other parts of the country. When they dance together, Hodel is intrigued and has now experienced a taste of what is not

traditional and how it is not necessarily a bad change. While it is not necessarily stated by Hodel, she may be more sexually intrigued by Hodel. This could be concluded based on Hodel's inevitable experiences as a young woman.

At Tzeitel and Motel's wedding, Hodel and Perchik demonstrate this new freedom they wish to exhibit at the wedding. When Perchik dances with Hodel, the wedding guests are shocked. Before, it was only customary for women to dance with women and men to dance with men. With this tradition being broken in front of the entire village, it is difficult for Tevye to cope with such a change. Perchik has now challenged the village's tradition and has expressed his willingness to change.

Not only is Perchik's idea about dancing shocking, but so is the idea that change is happening all over the country. He has found it important to embrace the change rather to run away from it. This breaking of tradition has now disturbed Tevye's world about his own beliefs and philosophies, by perhaps even questioning his faith. Religion and culture influence one another immensely and by challenging one, it is devastating for Tevye to cope with such a change. Perchik and Hodel are not asking for Tevye's permission to be married, but only his blessing. Despite Tevye's forbidding this arrangement, he eventually allowed himself to accept what his daughter wants and grants permission. Strangely, Tevye is willing to accept this marriage, even though this scenario also represents a break with tradition.

Tevye is eager to remain traditional for his daughter's sake, but the "generation gap" proceeds and another scenario has disturbed his world. His other daughter Chava has secretly been courting Fyedka, who is not of the same faith as Tevye and his family. By this point, Tevye has been reasonable and understanding to his daughters, but this is the tradition that must not be disturbed.

There can be much debate as to what religion the child of a mixed religion relationship will become. Regardless what religion is chosen, it can be an extremely difficult scenario to compromise within a marriage. Perhaps this may be what Tevye fears the most. Besides this being another horrific example of breaking with tradition, it also seems to disregard all of Tevye's faith and practices, which he cherishes so much. It must be devastating to find out that your own child wants to have no more ties to the family she has grown to love her entire life.

Exile from one's own family is an extreme form of separation. Tevye's has chosen not to speak to Chava for this outright defiance on her part to elope with Fyedka. This is the case that has not allowed Tevye to accept his daughters breaking with tradition, because he feels it to be the most insulting. One must wonder how Tevye was able to talk himself into accepting two of his daughter's marriages, but not Chava because she has decided to marry outside of the religion. Perhaps Tevye has seen this scenario played out in his mind and can only come to the conclusion that his daughter will be the unhappiest out of all his daughters.

With each daughter wanting to get married for different reasons, Tevye is ultimately unhappy with the choices his daughters have made. Nevertheless, he is willing to accept their breaking of tradition and becomes more concerned with their happiness. Yet, another question comes to mind. What makes each daughter decide to accept these proposals and break with tradition? Why would they want to worry their father, whom they love dearly, and risk losing the men they love? Certainly, they are all aware that they have not chosen the normal way for a woman in their culture to marry.

It is a certainty that change will occur for all cultures. Women are now free to marry whomever they please, as will Tevye's youngest daughters. While there is no real backstory to Tevye's daughters when they were growing up, it must be accepted that they certainly long to be

with these men out of love and not to go against their fathers wishes directly. The girls have not had a falling out with Tevye and are trying to get only what they want. It must be accepted that with times now changing, especially in other parts of the world. It is inevitable for the next generation to become curious and willing to explore that which is new, exciting, and unfamiliar.

At the end of the play, Tevye's two youngest daughters, Shprintze and Bielke are moving with their parents to America in light of the "Pale of Settlement." This was a term that refers to the time in tsarist Russia when Jews were forced to leave their homes. They have been outcast from their homeland and have been forced to find refuge in America.

"Jews were even then, however, confined within the so-called pale of settlement, denied the right to residence in the Great Russian provinces and unable to compete on equal terms with the corresponding social class." (Lestschinsky, pg. 142.)

With this geographic change, it is possible to assume that Shprintze and Bielke may find husbands in America, and who may not be Jewish. Tevye could find himself constantly battling his daughters suitors in America, since there will be a great deal of immigrants that will settle there over the next few decades. However, even though Tevye has constantly fought to keep tradition alive in his family, this may now be the time when he accepts that times are changing all over the world and he realizes that there is a "generation gap" that has divided what has been customary and what is now contemporary. Tevye's religious and cultural freedom has been taken from him and he will be forced to adapt to a new world.

"What prompted Jewish newcomers to set sail across the Atlantic? Was it a quest for religious freedom? Nearly all of them sought, in addition, a measure of anonymity, an avoidance of public notice,

for without exception they came from lands which still imposed disabilities on Jews and still enforced anti-Jewish laws of a medieval character. Where did they settle? Most Jews stayed well below the piedmont, in the tidewater areas. New Amsterdam-New York was the first and chief Jewish center, but only a short generation after the Brazilians arrived, a small settlement took shape at Newport, in the 1680s at the latest (Marcus, pg. 77).”

Having discussed all of Tevye’s daughters, there is one other area that should be mentioned. In light of all of Tevye’s daughters looking to find their own matches, he has also begun to wonder if his wife Golde is truly in love with him. Coming from an arranged marriage himself, he also sees that perhaps he has misunderstood women’s feelings. Perhaps he has taken them for granted because he has been in the same situation. Golde assures him that she does love him, but only after twenty-five years of marriage. Maybe Golde was once in a similar situation before she was married to Tevye, but decided not to ask questions about her own personal feelings and followed tradition.

Ultimately, who has more responsibility to the community by keeping the people happy and safe? Is it the rabbi, the men, the older men, or the wealthy? Why would they resist change, even if it were more beneficial to their society? The pogroms that were taking place in Russia may have had a lot to do with the fear that the elders felt by them leaving Anatevka. With an impeccable war looming, the younger generation that fled to America would have the traumatic experience of having to relocate.

“For a strategic generation, the relationship to war is a critical example of a traumatic event. In one of the classic modern studies

of generations, Richard Wohl (1979) showed how the consciousness and politics of the 1920s was entirely formed by the devastating experience of military conflict between 1914 and 1918. A similar argument can be made for the evolution of fascism in Germany in the 1930s out of the political defeat of the First World War.” (Turner, pg. 17)

What I find quite interesting about this analysis is that the time in which Tevye and his family are living may have something to do with the actual time *Fiddler on the Roof* was written. The time period suggests that the play takes place around the very beginning of the 20th century. With this in mind, there is evidence that the “generation gap” is apparent in Tevye’s family and probably for many other families that migrated to America.

Tevye and his wife are a hard working family. They have struggled a lot for themselves, but now that their daughters are at a suitable age to be married, it is important to look out for their future. Additionally, it must be important for the girl’s family to hope she is better off than she was previously. Then her parents will no longer have to provide for her, if she were to get into any kind of financial trouble. There is no longer any obligation for the girl’s parents to provide for her anymore. Her new husband will provide for everything once they are married. Perhaps this is why it is traditional for the female’s parents to pay for every part of the wedding ceremony. Maybe it is a way of stating “This is the last time I will ever provide anything for my daughter. Now that she is married, she is your responsibility.” Whatever path Tevye and his family take, the new generation will grow up with different ideologies that will shape their culture.

The Jewish community in *Fiddler on the Roof* is settled with a very simple way of life. The change the people of Anatevka must endure is actually much bigger than adapting to sewing machines and the role of the matchmaker becoming obsolete. It is much more difficult for the community to accept being driven away from their home. The change within the country is what really tests Anatevka's ability to cope with the change, as a new generation is to emerge. In this case, the political winds of change are also threatening to blow down the familiar structures that have already been in place.

It is difficult to imagine what the Jews have gone through in their history of change. With the Holocaust, the Russian Revolution, and the "pale of settlement," Jews are quite distinguished as far as the turmoil they have endured. Even though Jews are quite different, there are perhaps qualities about the way they have lived that can be compared to other ethnic groups. The Chinese were also another group that migrated to America. The circumstances were not necessarily similar to those of Jews migrating to America, but there are family ideologies that can be explored as to why the "generation gap" is apparent in some of theatre's most respected works.

CHAPTER III

FLOWER DRUM SONG

The population of the United States is diverse. Many different ethnic groups that have come from all over the world in pursuit of the “American Dream” have founded this country. Some of those nationalities have undergone extreme prejudices and scrutiny to even be allowed in the country, such as the Asian American communities which have spent a great deal of time in pursuit of acceptance and equality amidst circumstances that would otherwise keep them afar.

“In 1882 the Chinese Exclusion Act was passed with support from the Workingman’s Association and the Immigration Restriction League. Hill (1973) reports that ‘When the Chinese began to arrive in large numbers after 1850, the labor needs of the burgeoning urban factories and the vast railroad construction projects in the western part of the country could no longer be met by the existing white labor force. The Chinese, easily exploitable as cheap labor by virtue of their endurance, skills and availability, were an excellent solution’. (Cummings & Lambert, pg. 498)

It has been quite a struggle for Asian Americans to immigrate into the United States. At one time, there were laws prohibiting Asians from China, Japan, and the Philippines from entering this country. “...the Act of May 6, 1882 prohibited any State or United States Court from admitting Chinese to citizenship. The bar was not repealed until the Act of December 17,

1943. (Fong, pg. 409) One law did not even allow Asian-Americans to become naturalized until approximately 1950.

“Not until the Act of June 27, 1952 was there a removal of discrimination for naturalization based on race. This Act of June 27, 1952 embodies the principal provisions of our naturalization law.” (Fong, 410)

C. Y. Lee wrote his first novel, *Flower Drum Song*, shortly after winning first prize in a writing contest he had previously entered. To his surprise, the novel quickly became a bestseller.

“The popular success of Lee’s novel should be seen within a broader context of Asian American writing. The growing acceptance of the ethnicity paradigm opened up a new cultural space for minority writers.” (Klein, pg. 227)

In the musical comedy, *Flower Drum Song*, the story focuses on a family that has been living in America and a father who is determined to have his son marry a true Chinese girl. Aside from the love story within the musical play, which is what keeps the progression of the story, each love interest in the play has a different take on the “generation gap” presented. Each female role that has an interest in Wang Ta (the son) has a different background, which in turn, allows for a different perspective.

It is important to note that the version of *Flower Drum Song* that is being used here will be the original musical version. Oscar Hammerstein II and Joseph Fields wrote the lyrics and book. C.Y. Lee published the novel in 1957, and the musical was produced a year later in 1958. The role of which version is used is important because of the differences that can be argued. Additionally, the film version will not be included. There are only a few differences that can be

discussed, but in keeping this thesis focused on theatre, only the book and lyrics of the musical version will mostly be referenced.

The opening of *Flower Drum Song* finds the household of Wang Chi Yang faced with problems of adjustment. Mr. Wang is a Chinese gentleman of the old school, and his son Wang Ta is caught between Chinese tradition and American ways. His second son Wang San is entirely Americanized, and his sister-in-law, Madam Liang, is an enthusiastic candidate for citizenship. Madam Liang and Wang Ta discuss the methods of choosing a wife, and Wang Ta tells her he has made his own choice, and he describes how he will propose to her. Sammy Fong, owner of The Celestial Bar, arrives and announces that his mail-order bride has arrived from China. However, he is in love with someone else, and succeeds in selling the contract to old Mr. Wang. He then introduces the bride, Mei Li and her father, Dr. Li, and Mei Li charms Mr. Wang and Madam Liang with her "flower drum song," *A Hundred Million Miracles*.

Wang Ta has gone off to meet his girl Linda Low. Although there are a few unexplained facts about her existence, he asks her to marry him and she accepts. When Mei Li at last meets Wang Ta, she is delighted with him and, since she does not know about his engagement to Linda, begins to feel at home in the Wang household. That night, graduation exercises for Madam Liang's citizenship class take place in Mr. Wang's garden, and Mr. Wang buys an American dress for Mei Li. Wang Ta is impressed by her beauty, but remains faithful to Linda.

Linda appears at the party, and Wang Ta announces their engagement, infuriating old Mr. Wang and deeply hurting Mei Li. When Sammy Fong shows up, it develops that Linda is the girl with whom he is in love, and he generously warns Mei Li about his own bad qualities. He then invites the Wang's to The Celestial Bar, where Linda is employed as a singer, knowing that when they find this out, the marriage will be cancelled. When Linda returns to the bar, she tells

Sammy and her seamstress Helen Chao that she is quitting to marry Wang Ta. When the Wang party arrives at the club, Linda turns up doing a strip tease. The Wang's leave in horrified astonishment and Sammy is happy that his plan has succeeded.

The confused Wang Ta cannot make up his mind whether he prefers Mei Li or Linda Low, and turns briefly to Helen Chao for comfort. Old Mr. Wang and Madam Liang leave the house and are determined to hold Sammy Fong to his marriage contract. By this time, however, Sammy has proposed to Linda and been accepted, and they are happily looking forward to their lives together. When Dr. Li presents his case against Sammy to The Three Family Association, it is decided that Sammy must honor the contract, and the Li's take up residence in his apartment as preparations for the wedding begin. Wang Ta belatedly discovers that it is Mei Li he loves, and they try to figure a way out of the dilemma. As the wedding procession winds its way to the rooms of The Three Family Association, Wang Ta, Linda and Sammy are all waiting unhappily for the ceremony none of them wants to see, but the inventive Mei Li at the last moment provides a happy solution, and the curtain falls on two pairs of happy sweethearts.

First of all, the main character's father, Master Wang, has a first-born son who is about to finish college and Wang is eager for him to get married to a nice traditional Chinese girl. However, in San Francisco, where they have settled, it is much more difficult to find women who have grown up with Chinese values and traditions. For this reason, it is crucial for Master Wang to keep an eye out for this particular girl.

“In 1943 the Chinese Exclusion Act was repealed and China was assigned a token quota of 105. Because wives now could be admitted as non-quota immigrants, female migrants vastly outnumbered males from 1943 to 1970. Many of these women

were wives who were left behind and who were reunited with their husbands after several decades of living apart.” (Kitano, etc. pg. 184)

Master Wang is himself a traditional Asian American who still finds it difficult to transition his ways to the way American’s live. For example, he even refuses to keep his money in a bank, but rather in a chest underneath his bed. According to him, his money is like a man’s wife, “strangers should not get their hands on it.” (Hammerstein, pg. 17)

This could be seen as the “racial” generation gap that could be identified in *Fiddler on the Roof*. Master Wang has found it extremely important for his first born son to marry a traditional Chinese girl, he wants there to be no difference in race or morals because they are the values that he cherishes the most for his future generation. Shepard Schwartz writes,

“We have previously mentioned that country of birth constitutes an important factor in mate-selection. ...the nativity of Chinese grooms marrying Chinese brides is given by the place of birth of the latter. The tendency for individuals to marry mates of like origin, as indicated by these data, is significant at the 0.01 level of probability.” (Schwartz, pg. 566)

While this study mentioned here refers to Chinese-Americans in New York, it is understood that New York and San Francisco were primary ports of entry for many Chinese immigrants. Similarly, this could be seen as Tevye’s motive for not wanting his daughter Chava to marry outside of family. Both Master Wang and Tevye are looking out for the best interest of their children, but it is the first-born generation that may find it easier to break away in a new environment.

Ta understands that it is important to his father that he marries within the same group (Asian). The problem here is that Wang must understand that he should now be considered Asian American, and his morals and values will change because of their geography and political values that are different in their new country. It is a safe assumption that Wang's youngest son, San, will marry and grow up with completely Americanized values. This is again is a parallel to the *assimilated* generation gap that Tevye's youngest daughters will undoubtedly encounter. So, it is important for his eldest son to hold on to the traditions, values, and morals that have identified them in their home country.

It may be important to note that Asians attempts to relocate to the United States have been difficult nonetheless. The effort has become an aggravation because of the amount of time it takes for their documents to be approved. In *Flower Drum Song*, Mei Li and her father Dr. Li have made it into San Francisco illegally and are in town to honor an agreement established by a Mr. Sammy Wong. Sammy's mother has issued him a mail order bride for him to marry, but he is in love with another woman. Because of Sammy's relationship with Master Wang, he has decided to amend his agreement by introducing Mei Li to Master Wang's son Ta, who according to his father, is in need of a good traditional Chinese girl.

As the musical develops, it is clear that Master Wang's children have become completely Americanized to the extent that he sometimes does not even understand the language they have adopted. Master Wang's oldest son, Ta, has been seeing a girl named Linda and he has asked her to marry him. Ta understands that it is customary for his father to choose a bride for him. But because they now live in America, he has decided to exercise his right to court anyone he chooses and find a bride that he sees fitting. Master Wang is particularly disappointed in his son.

In his opinion, while he knows nothing of women, it is customary and logical for the father to choose a bride which he sees fitting.

Similar to *Fiddler on the Roof*, Ta's perspective on choosing his own wife is comparable to the courtship of Tzeitel and Motel. Tzeitel and Ta feel that choosing the person they want to marry will allow for greater happiness. Is it unfair for someone to want happiness? Both Tzeitel and Ta want to choose their own spouses so that they can be happy. After all, happiness is part of the "American Dream." Why should this be considered an unreasonable request to their parents? Perhaps it is not.

Again, Master Wang is looking out for the well being of his children and that is why he is insistent on his son marrying a true traditional Chinese girl. Just living in San Francisco has already Americanized his children. In the movie version of this musical, there is a song that was not in the original stage version. A song titled "*The Other Generation*" allows Master Wong's children to express their disapproval of their father's traditional views.

"In the song 'The Other Generation,' both sides lament how they can't understand the other because the way they were raised was so different. In truth, that is exactly what we are faced with now. The generation of youngsters who helped Mom and Dad (and frequently their teachers) with their computers often come to college never having touched a print index or even a print encyclopedia." (Peek, web)

Perhaps by Ta marrying a traditional Chinese girl from China, he will remember his roots and allow for their culture to thrive for another generation. While Master's Wang's youngest son is too young to be married, it seems as if he has already completely given up hope of having his

younger son grow up with any Chinese culture. Again, this is the “*racial*” generational gap discussed earlier.

Ta actually has the biggest dilemma in the play *Flower Drum Song*. There are three women who are all either in love or infatuated with Ta. Linda is more infatuated with Ta because she is also dating Sammy Wong at the same time. This love triangle complicates the dilemma for Linda as well. Linda is dating Sammy Wong and Ta at the same time. It may appear that Linda doesn’t know which man she wants, but perhaps there is an underlying intention here.

While Linda is probably particularly interested in Ta because he comes from a wealthy family, perhaps there is also some comfort in knowing that her potential future in-laws are strict, traditional Asian Americans from China as well. Linda has hired an employee from the club to pose as her brother from the navy to meet Ta’s family, so as to give consent for their marriage. While the man is not actually her brother, she has gone through the trouble of finding somebody to pretend to be her brother and give her consent to marry. Even though it is a phony consent, she seems to care enough to at least make it look as if she cares about traditional values. Linda is probably more concerned with her financial well being rather than love for Ta. Today, it is certainly quite important to think about finances when considering marriage. However, to what extent are finances more important than love, or traditional and family values?

Mei Li is the innocent character in this musical that has followed what is expected of her. She has fallen in love with Ta because she is aware of his status and he can provide a happy life for her in America. Her values are from China and she wants to please her father by finding the perfect husband for herself. Despite Ta’s treatment towards her early on in the musical, she remains loyal to her goal and tries to have him fall in love with her.

“Although Mei Li adopts numerous Americanisms-she picks up some slang and learns how to kiss from watching TV-she never loses all her conventional markers of Chineseness: her halting speech, her quiet modesty, her way of dressing and bowing. She is the heroine because she holds assimilation in balance with ethnicity.” (Klein, pg. 240)

A question that is interesting about Mei Li’s situation is “would she still fall in love with Ta, if it weren’t for the arrangement made by Sammy Fong and her father’s insistence to have her married?” There certainly are several wants presented by this play. Sammy Fong wants for Mei Li to marry Ta so that he can be with Linda; Mei Li wants to marry somebody in America so that she can be a citizen of the U.S. Again, the question remains for Mei Li, which is would she still love Ta if it wasn’t an arranged marriage? She came all the way from China to marry Sammy Fong and was prepared to be his wife so that she could come to the country. Because of Sammy’s situation, he decided to dump his marriage on Master Wang, who conveniently needed a woman for his oldest son. Ultimately, the arrangement had the potential to work from the very beginning. Because of everybody’s different wants, a great amount of conflict is created, which is basically the root of any good story.

There is strong evidence here that the “generation gap” presented in this musical is the cause of many of the problems within this musical comedy. While this concerns a different ethnic group apart from the Jewish community, there are striking similarities. Both musicals have conflicts that include arranged marriages and the freedom of choice adds to whether happiness can actually be achieved against a parents wishes.

Tzeitel and Motel are hoping that Tevye will accept their attraction to each other, even though there was no matchmaker involved. It is a question as to whether children can truly choose the appropriate person that will make them happy. Ta has asked Linda to marry him and this has upset his father because he believes it is the father's duty to choose a bride for him, since he doesn't know much about women. Both Tzeitel and Ta are exercising their right to marry whom they choose. The main difference between these two scenarios is that Tzeitel is still living with her parents in their hometown. Ta and his father have relocated to America where traditions are not followed anymore and there is more freedom to adapt to American standards.

Another noticeable "generation gap" conflict presented in *Flower Drum Song* is Master Wang's stubbornness to adapt to American customs. He has refused to put his money in a bank and has therefore been robbed outside his house. When he finally gives in to have his money deposited in a bank, he is bitter about leaving references for the bank associate. He feels the cash he is depositing is enough for him to show that he has credentials for creating an account. Master Wang is also confused with the vocabulary his younger son uses. He is the one who has become the most Americanized individual in the house. Similar to *Fiddler on the Roof*, Tevye's daughters will go to America and most likely learn English and they will both adapt to the American way of life, just as San, Master Wang's youngest son has.

While it is similar to Ta's situation, Sammy Fong has also tried to break away from tradition that his mother has established. Sammy's mother ordered a bride for him to marry, but he doesn't want to marry her. He wants to be with Linda, even though she is also going out with Ta. Sammy could have easily just sent Mei Li and her father back to China when she showed up, but he decided to help out a young girl by finding her a husband. While Sammy's intentions may appear to be selfish, I believe he is actually being considerate of Mei Li and his mother.

The audience never sees Sammy's mother, but it could probably be concluded that she is just as traditional as Master Wang.

There is one subtle "technological" generation gap that is apparent in *Flower Drum Song*. While Mei Li is trying to find a loophole to get out of her marriage to Sammy Fong, she discovers her solution to the problem by watching a television show. Since this play takes place in approximately the same time it was written, an added point would be that had this play taken place during her grandfather's generation, there would not have been the technology to provide this type of ending.

Even though *Fiddler on the Roof* and *Flower Drum Song* deal with different nationalities, there are some very obvious similarities between the two. Both plays deal with the younger generation wanting to break away from tradition. Each next generation has a desire to change from what was customary, which in the case of these two plays, is almost exactly the same situation.

"History has shown us that in periods of destabilization, groups will tend to hold onto what is stable, known, and constant. Eventually, adoption occurs as the dust settles. Right now we have little concrete evidence about how the 'other' generation will bring forth its new values and norms into the old paradigm. Thus predictions are problematic." (Peek, web)

One conclusion that could be made by comparing these two plays is that both nationalities have a tendency to be close to each other's family. Family values appear to be quite sacred, whether it has to do with religion or not. It is interesting and fair to bring up these similarities because if a Chinese girl wanted to marry a Jewish boy, both families would be

against the whole arrangement. Each side would be against the arrangement because for one, it is not tradition to marry outside the family, but also because each group is different. But are they really that different? Both seem to have a close ties to the family and both seem very committed to staying with tradition. While the differences between the two plays presented so far are quite different, there are still striking similarities that can be compared.

CHAPTER IV

OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS

As explored in Chapter 3, it was extremely difficult for anyone from the Asian community to migrate to the United States up until the beginning of the twentieth century. Immigrants came from all over Europe to establish a better life for themselves and their families. For Italians, it was much different. Many immigrants were able to find their way to New York and other surrounding areas, as it was the Eastern port to the United States. With so many different nationalities settling in the U.S., it was sometimes difficult for immigrants to find work. Many of these groups in America would work together, live together, and stay close to their family. Farley writes,

“It is often assumed that immigrants enter with few skills other than a strong back and a willingness to work hard. One thinks of the Irish and Italian laborers who came to New York in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and then dug subways or built bridges, -and still do-a great deal of agricultural labor. The popular image of past assimilation contends that the first generation started at the bottom of the occupational ladder, but their sons and daughters and then their grandchildren invested in education, capitalized upon opportunities in the nation’s expanding

economy, and moved rapidly into the middle class without much help from the government.” (Farley, pg. 669-670)

Over The River And Through The Woods focuses on Nick, a young Italian American who stays quite close to both sets of his grandparents in Hoboken, New Jersey. Nick’s parents moved to Florida because they wanted to be near the sea in their retirement, so he lives near his grandparents. At dinner one evening, Nick surprises his grandparents with the news that he has received a job promotion which will require him to relocate to Seattle, Washington. This news worries his grandparents because of their extremely close ties to him and their traditional Sunday dinners each week. It becomes apparent to Nick’s grandparents that there is only one way for him to stay close to home. If he were to find a girl that he could date, he would be obligated to stay in New Jersey, rejecting his promotion.

By analyzing this part of the plot, my hypothesis will be tested by examining Italians in a play. It will be more closely looked at as to whether family values have changed over the course of the decades that have passed. With this play taking place close to the end of the 20th century, there may be differences within the “generation gap” that have now changed.

To help Nick stay in Hoboken, his grandparents invite Caitlin over to dinner. She is approximately the same age as Nick. The second Caitlin rings the doorbell, it is clear what Nick’s grandparent’s intentions are. Nick, mortified, tries to explain to Caitlin that she is not obligated to stay for dinner, but stays anyway. At dinner, Nick’s grandparents embarrass him constantly by bringing up old childhood stories and implying that Nick and Caitlin should be getting married soon. After such embarrassment, Nick yells at his grandparents and chases Caitlin away. Upon leaving the house, Caitlin tells Nick that she would have liked to enjoy Nick’s company much more, but his attitude and courtesy to his grandparents was completely

unacceptable and unattractive to her. The first act ends with Nick yelling once again at his grandparents and stating that he will be moving to Seattle, whether they are supportive or not. Because of Nick's inability to control his temper, he suffers a panic attack and is taken to the hospital. In regards to my hypothesis, the examination of marriage will also be given attention to whether there has been much or any change to the "generation gap." The previous two plays have dealt with the subject of marriage, but will now be examined by looking at a different ethnic group and time period.

In Act II, Nick has recovered from his anxiety, but continues to explain to his grandparents that he will still be moving to Seattle. His grandparents tell him various stories from their past as a way to coax him into staying. Caitlin comes to visit him, after hearing that he was in the hospital. She provides him with more explanation as to why she rejected him. It is revealed that she has very fond memories of her grandparents, and it made her upset to even think about being disrespectful to anyone's grandparents. There is a brief exchange between Nick and Caitlin where he asks her out again. But she rejects him again because of the possibility that he may ultimately leave to Seattle, she believes a long distance relationship would not work out.

Nick, then, finally tells his grandparents that he has decided to take the job offer and relocate to Seattle. Two of his grandparents are still upset about his decision, and the other two tell him that they respect his decision and understand that it is something he feels he must do. It is then revealed that one of his grandfathers has cancer and decides to keep the news from Nick, as he would not want Nick to stay just for his personal reason.

In the final scene, Nick has moved to Seattle and has learned that his grandfather had cancer and passed away. He came back for the funeral, but in the intervening years, two more of

his grandparents passed away, leaving Nick with only one grandmother. Nick explains to her that she should move out to Seattle with him since there is no family left in New Jersey. Nick also goes on to explain that he found a girl where he is working with, he will get married to her, and start a family.

Based upon *Over the River and Through the Woods*, new theories about the “generation gap” can be explored. The time period may be a factor as to how the “generation gap” has changed over the years, but viewed from a much different setting from the previous two musicals. With the examination of marriage constant throughout each chapter, the element of growth amongst children will also be studied.

Even though this is the only non-musical compared, there are still some very striking similarities that can be analyzed. As another ethnic group that immigrated to the United States, the Italian Americans shared very close family ties. Paul J. Campisi explains,

“All the characteristics of the Old World Italian peasant family are intimately tied in with such institutions and practices as religion, the planting and gathering of food, the celebrations of feasts and holidays, the education of the children, the treatment of the sick, the protection of the person, and with all other aspects of small-village folk culture. In the final analysis Old World peasant-family life meant small-village life, and the two were inseparable aspects of a coercive folk-peasant culture. This fact sharply distinguishes the Old World peasant family from the first and second-generation families in America.” (Campisi, pg. 446-447)

Tradition seems to be held sacred, at least in the first groups of immigrants. Trying to find acceptance in one's family is equally important because of the close family ties. Marriage, yet again, appears to be a universal tradition that causes many families distress.

Tradition appears to play another sacred role in the lives of Italian Americans. In *Over The River And Through The Woods*, Nick's grandparents greatly value their Sunday dinners with Nick. As I am sure it has been true for many years, it is customary for families to gather together on a particular day of the week to have dinner. Sunday usually seems to be the standard day because it is still during the weekend, and there would be little to no excuse for not being able to attend a gathering. The workweek is designated for just that, and the weekend is often looked at as a day of rest and a time to spend with one's family. Jon D. Holtzman writes,

“A vast literature—some in anthropology, although much in folklore and other fields—has been concerned with how American ethnic identities in particular are maintained and performed through food. Thus, a plethora of studies demonstrate how various ethnic American groups use food – to maintain a historically validated ethnic identity.” (Holtzman, pg. 366) “As a form of memory, ‘nostalgia’ has several different senses, generally and in respect to food. Some food literature relies on a lay notion of sentimentality for a lost past, viewing food as a vehicle for recollections of childhood and family.” (Holtzman, pg. 367)

But why is it so important to spend time with one's family? Should it be looked at as an obligation? Should there be a time limit as what is sufficient family time? Not everyone is given such opportunities. Sometimes, children have both parents, but there is no family bond and

children grow up feeling awkward around company. One would like to believe that family serves as much more than an obligation. It is a privilege to have the company of others that show affection and love. It is possible that studies will show that children can have a greater chance of happiness when surrounded by nurturing people, no matter what the relationship might be.

The close family ties that some Italian American's share with each other can sometimes cause conflict within the family. Humans will always make mistakes. Sometimes, individuals wallow in such extremities when it comes to doing the wrong thing. And yet, in spite of any situation, families sometimes greatly understand the concept of forgiveness. Yes, it is normal to make mistakes, but it is when our family loves us so much in spite of those imperfections that make those relationships much more special.

Nick is looking for acceptance from his grandparents and their blessing to be okay with his job promotion across the country. Even though his grandparents do not necessarily agree with his decision, two of them can respect it. It is important for Nick to have their approval because they are all special to him. According to Perlmann,

“Shifts in the structure of the economy aggravate the impact of discrimination: while poorly-educated immigrant parents seem to have no trouble getting started at the very bottom, the shift toward knowledge-intensive jobs means that the next generation will have to do well in school if it wishes to surpass the achievements of the foreign born.” (Perlmann, pg. 893)

Tzeitel and Motel also look for approval from Tevye for them to marry. While they are two different scenarios, the family values still seem to be apparent in *Fiddler on the Roof*,

Flower Drum Song and *Over the River and Through the Woods*. Relationships amongst family members are a sacred element in many of today's ethnic groups in the United States.

Marriage is yet another similar element found that has emerged in all of the plays discussed. In *Fiddler on the Roof*, all of Tevye's daughters are looking to marry, but have found the non-traditional method of courtship. *Flower Drum Song* illustrates how important it is to marry within one's race while pleasing the immediate family. In *Over the River and Through the Woods*, there is a slightly different idea that exists within the story. This last play mentioned will discuss how marriage is seen more a definition of settlement for Nick, the main character.

Nick is not looking for a wife at all. It hasn't even crossed his mind until his grandparents brought it up. Nick is only looking out for his career and a way of improving his way of living. Nick's grandparents, on the other hand, feel that by getting married and staying close to home, this will fulfill his wish to be happy. This again, is another illustration on how different the generations have changed over the years. And not necessarily just amongst certain ethnicities, but all. In this case, Nick has embraced a different philosophy than his family.

Nancy S. Landale writes,

“Theories of nuptiality have long emphasized the importance of economic opportunity to the timing of marriage. The basic argument is that in societies in which financial and residential independence is expected of newlywed couples, marital timing is linked closely to the economic conditions present in the immediate geographic locale. Where opportunities for employment are plentiful, marriage generally is early and universal; where opportunities are more limited, marriage occurs later and a higher

percentage of persons will never marry. Young men living in areas where land was relatively scarce and expensive were less likely to have married than others.” (Landale, pg. 106)

In *Over the River and Through the Woods*, it is not important to Nick’s grandparent whom Nick marries. They are only concerned with Nick remaining in New Jersey so that he can stay close to them. While Tevye and Master Wang want their children to marry within their own ethnic group, Nick’s grandparents are well aware that Caitlin is Irish and they have no objection. They need someone to tie Nick to, and Caitlin’s strong New Jersey roots and perhaps her religion will connect them.

Back when this country was still being developed, the Irish and Italians were two groups that were typically housed in the same area, or ghetto. Living in such small proximities of each other is probably what aided in these two groups not getting along. Ironically, it is often the differences that one sees that stirs fear. However, if one were to step back from the big picture, it is actually the similarities that are sometimes strangely related.

Customarily, in the United States, immigrants would move from the old country to a place near their point of entry. For European families, the main point of entry was New York City and its suburbs. “In one year alone, in 1907, more than 300,000 Italians entered the port of New York. In 1910, Italian population had risen to 2,104,309.” (Corsi, pg. 100) Traditionally, the immigrants would move to a part of the city that already had an established ethnic culture like their own, so language difficulties were fewer.

“In tandem with nativity, language is considered to be an indicator of cultural assimilation. Bilingual persons who speak English

poorly are most likely to live in residential enclaves.” (Logan, Zhang, Alba, pg. 307)

In Nick’s case, his family moved to a large Italian area of Hoboken, a short subway ride from Manhattan.

“New York, like most large American cities in the Northeast and Midwest, is a product of immigration, and every successive wave of immigrants since the mid-nineteenth century has left its mark on its neighborhoods.” (Logan, Zhang, Alba, pg. 302)

The earliest settlers frequently look down on the group that came first. In turn, as the new ethnic group is established, it tends to look down on the group of immigrants. During the time of the Great Famine in Ireland, many Irish immigrated to New York in hopes of escaping the famine that was the cause of approximately 1 million people in Ireland.

“At the time of the Great Hunger, many Protestant politicians and media perpetuated the idea that the thousands of poor and unskilled Irish landing daily on U.S. shores were an invasion of the American way of life, a social plague, and a ‘cultural tumor eating away at America’s heart and soul.’ The structure of economic and social life in America centered on an ideology that believed prosperity and success was a sign of one’s virtue and intelligence and that its outward manifestation was land-ownership and wealth.” (Brighton, pg. 135)

In the 1920’s, Caitlin’s Irish parents would have objected to her marrying an Italian, but by approximately 1980, these groups were so well assimilated that ethnicity is not important.

Caitlin's parents would probably just be thrilled to know she was marrying into at least the same religion.

“...Marriage was no more attractive an option in America than it had been in Ireland. In both Ireland and the United States, an emotional coldness existed between the two sexes; sexual puritanism without a doubt took much of the zip out of wedlock. ...Irish women in America were *less* likely than those of other nationalities to be in the workplace. As the dominant force in Irish homes, Irish mothers complemented the efforts of their single sisters, leading a slow but tenacious drive toward middle-class respectability.” (McCaffrey, pg. 84)

Both Nick and Caitlin are probably Catholic, which is still probably an important consideration to Nick's grandparents. If so, then they are not breaking the taboo that Chava did by marrying Fyedka. “No longer self-consciously Catholic, unsatisfied by the material affluence of suburban life, many younger Irish-Americans seem to find a certain solace in the historical and cultural aspects of their ethnicity. (McCaffrey, pg. 93)

Since Nick's parents have actually gone on to greener acres in Florida, the grandparents need Nick for his supportive behavior as they age. But Nick, like his parents and Tevye's daughters Shprintze and Bielke, is too Americanized to even see that need. He wants to strike out on his own and does not recognize what they think they are losing. The grandparents stronger ethnic ties expect the younger ones to be around as the older ones age. They expect the coming generations to be there for them, as traditionally no other support system existed. The

more Americanized younger people in this play would not have been aware of such a need.

Campisi writes,

“By the first-generation Italian family is simply meant that organization of parents and offspring wherein both parents are of foreign birth and wherein an attempt is made to perpetuate an Italian way of life in the transplanted house-hold. This is a family in transition, still struggling against great odds to keep alive those customs and traditions which were sacred in the Old World culture.” (Campisi, pg. 447)

Regardless of Nick’s grandparent’s intentions, they ultimately want Nick to be happy with a girl. Even though they did not specifically say so, they must be concerned with their grandson’s happiness and his transition to the American way of life. Paul J. Campisi refers to this period as the *accommodation stage*.

“This period begins with the realization by parents and children that the continuation of hostility, misunderstanding, and contravention behavior can result only in complete deterioration of the family. The ambivalent attitude of the children toward the parents, of great affection, on the one hand, and hostility, on the other, now tends to be replaced by a more tolerant disposition. This stage begins when the offspring reach adulthood and marry and establish households of their own, for by this time the control by the parents is greatly lessened.” (Campisi, pg. 449)

A family's criterion for a spouse usually leans toward the same race. How often is it heard of two different ethnicities getting along? Having a granddaughter with the same values as their grandson would most importantly benefit the family. Perhaps even if the girl being an Italian were not a factor in choosing a spouse for Nick, they most certainly would approve of a girl that would keep the family close.

“During the twenties both the immigrants and their married children lived largely in the same neighborhoods. Marriages outside the immediate neighborhood meant marriage to an Italian of a different provincial origin and was regarded with some disapproval. As a matter of fact the cultural differences represented by the parental group were often quite desperate. ...children of such ‘mixed marriages’ had to contend with the norms of several cultures, the American ones of the school and streets, and two Italian ones.” (Lalli, pg 46)

This again could be Master Wang's motive for having a traditional Chinese daughter for his son Ta, in *Flower Drum Song*. Perhaps families weren't interested in complicating their lives by having mixed marriages within their families. It must have been difficult already to live in America as an immigrant during any of these time periods (1950's and 1980). Even today, it is not always easy for families to mix ethnicities.

Today, it sometimes seems harder to stay in touch with relatives. With technology evolving at such an alarming pace, innovations have allowed for our way of lives to run faster and more convenient. The internet and cell phone carriers have found ways for people to interact with each other at any time of the day, without having the need to actually see or even hear the

other person. This lack of human interaction could be evolving the future generations into a less interactive society where emotions are just signals floating around in this digital air that has been produced.

Even though Nick's grandparents do not say so, it is important for families to stay close to each other. It is obvious that his grandparents love and cherish the moments they get to spend with each other. Elders in the family are those that keep the need for each other intact. It is not a situation that should be taken for granted. As mentioned before, not everyone has the luxury of having people who can be viewed as family. Sometimes, there are friends and acquaintances that act as family. Children can grow up without ever knowing that the two people they knew all of their lives, were only their adoptive parents, but still feel the same love that they would have for their natural parents.

Over The River And Through The Woods has presented a different perspective on the generation gaps that have been presented. Yet, there are still ways to find similarities between this play and *Flower Drum Song* or *Fiddler on the Roof*. While *Over The River...* has given a slightly different perspective, it is important to understand that the elder generation can still have a tremendous impact on their children.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Theatre is without equal as society's means to explore different cultures. *Fiddler on the Roof* has the most support for this thesis because it mentions every variation on the "generation gap" introduced in Chapter 1. The subsequent plays follow *Fiddler on the Roof* as further examples of cultural themes. Exploration of other plays would no doubt shed even more light on how modern societies view culture.

Discussing *Fiddler on the Roof*, via the *technology gap*, the *philosophical gap*, the *religious/moral gap*, and the *assimilation gap* reveals a correlation among the plays that would follow. Each of Tevye's daughters in *Fiddler on the Roof* provided an example of each "gap" perfectly because the entire theme of the play dealt with how traditional values have changed throughout each generation. Even more conveniently, each daughter in the play offered a different type of "generation gap" to be discussed and compared.

Flower Drum Song provided another set of examples using the same types of "generation gaps." Even though this dealt with a completely different race, it was apparent that the situations were similar, regardless of race. Master Wang was a very similar character to Tevye because of their own personal wants and goals for their children. The subject of marriage was important in Chapter 2 because *Flower Drum Song* showed great examples as to the Chinese encountered problems that are universal to other ethnic groups. Of course the year the musical was produced could also have been a factor that may have changed how marriage was experienced. Most

importantly, it was crucial to Master Wang that his children keep the values he grew up with and cherished. Marrying a Chinese girl made a big difference for musical's ending. The ending made the statement that old traditions are sporadically hard to break. It may have seemed to the audience that young Ta would rebelliously go against his father's wishes by marrying Linda, but instead, found bliss through his father's recommendation. This is a big difference in comparison to *Fiddler on the Roof* because every daughter of Tevye rebelled against him. This rebellion seems to be what could have been a trending pattern in regards to the changes in cultures "generation gaps."

Finally, *Over The River And Through The Woods* provided further insights on the "generation gap." Since this play dealt with a different age group, the "generation gaps" are different and also fewer. This ultimately resulted in different insights and conclusions than the previous chapters such as moving away from family. Because this play takes place close to the end of the 20th century, there is room to interpret that the "generation gap" will still most likely go through different changes with the years to come and may not necessarily represent the way it was viewed decades ago. The plays shows us that moving away from family is more accepted now than it was in previous generations, as well as marrying outside of a particular ethnicity. Since technology will continue to evolve, there will be changes that are inevitable and will most likely affect all future generations. Nonetheless, there is still a different perspective on the "generation gap" that can be analyzed for further discussion. Because *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Flower Drum Song* and *Over The River And Through The Woods* all deal with immigration to America, further research on the history of each race in America can provide additional insight on the subject of how the "generation gap" has evolved in America. Researching this could provide useful to theatre historians who are looking to find links between plays in American

history that have made an impact on the “generation gap.” For example, Mexican American plays could be another strong subject to explore, among many others, in regards to this thesis. Speaking as a Mexican American, I briefly mentioned the similarities that Mexican Americans may share with the ethnic groups discussed in this thesis. I purposely left out a Mexican American plays because this could illustrate that there are still additional ethnic groups that could be further researched. Additionally, it is my view that there could certainly be more ethnic groups examined through this hypothesis and find interesting results. Theatre is the tool by which human beings lives are reflected and projected onto the world. By examining these components, future theatre researchers will be able to understand more about ourselves and how we are all connected. Culture is one of the primary means by which humans establish their identities. Theatre can certainly help us to understand how and why we are all connected. The plays selected for this thesis were strictly seen as three different genres. When looking at each play as a musical drama, musical comedy and a straight play, it should be clear that theatre still has many more works that can examined through this hypothesis.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jesus Briones is a Master of Arts and earned his MA degree in Theatre on August 13, 2013. He entered graduate school in the summer of 2009. His previous degree in Communications in Theatre was received on May 14, 2005. His email address is jbriones@broncs.utpa.edu. His mailing address is P.O. Box 514, Donna, TX. 78537.

Mr. Briones has been involved with the University of Texas Pan American theatre since first entering the program in 2002. He has been involved in many productions such as *Con Mis Manos/With My Hands* and *The Red and the Blue* as the prop master. Along with being prop master for these shows, he has also been prop master for the incredibly popular show *Late Bloomers* and *La Lente Maravillosa*, written by Dr. Eric Wiley, which has toured to various locations across the Rio Grande Valley. *La Lente Maravillosa* is a children's play performed in Spanish that was performed at select elementary schools in the RGV. *Late Bloomers* is a winter Texan comedy that has received critical acclaim among winter Texan resorts and parks throughout the RGV.

Before graduating with his masters in theatre, he was one of the three directors or the 2013 P.A.S.S. (Pan American Summer Stock) season. He directed *Over the River and Through the Woods*, which ran from July 4 through July 7, 2013.

In addition to working on various productions at UTPA and amidst his academic studies, he has also held the position as the Student Box Office Manager and House Manager with the University Theatre at UTPA.