

I first encountered this play in the eighth grade. I fell in love with it. But when I thought about putting it up here, I didn't want to have two white people talking about intergenerational wealth and privilege, as the play is traditionally cast. I found much richer dramatic material in the idea of dwelling in dissonance. Towards the end, Melissa writes to Andy:

*"I keep thinking about that strange old world we grew up in. How did it manage to produce both you and me? A stalwart upright servant of the people, and a boozed out, cynical, lascivious old broad. The best and the worst, that's us."*

It's a line that has me thinking about the high-achieving, rise-up-the-system mindset with which Asian immigrant children grow up. Yet, it's weird to hear Asian actors say this text. The elephant in the room when Asian people play these characters is that Andy and Melissa never question their place in America. But for the first half of the play's time period (prior to the passage of the Hart-Celler Act of 1965), Asians weren't even allowed to immigrate to America.

You'll notice in the middle that Melissa makes some pretty racist remarks about Asian people. These characters glorify whiteness, something for which Asian Americans have historically strived at the cost of Black Americans and other Asian Americans. It's a quest that has condemned us to solitude. In *The Loneliest Americans*, Jay Caspian Kang writes:

*"When I say Asians are the loneliest Americans, I am talking about the loneliness that comes from attempts to assimilate, whether by melting into the white middle class or by creating an elaborate, yet ultimately derivative, racial 'identity'... There are no shared struggles between, say, the wealthy child of Indian doctors... and the first-generation undocumented immigrant from Fujian Province who delivers their meals... How do you create a people out of such silly connections?... And yet, what else are we supposed to do?"*

This play is about loneliness. This play is about connection. It's about trying to connect with each other when you're lonely. *An Asian American play*. It's why you see the above passage projected throughout the play, perpetually looming over the heads of these Asian actors. To ask these questions to our audiences. I'm putting this play on because I think the answer has something to do with love, and also to help bring visibility, through theater, to a minority group for whom the idea of invisibility has become cliché.

Beyond Asian Americans, I'm putting this play on for college students. The power of the play as it is traditionally done stems from two older actors speaking the words of young children. When youth is past, it is haunting to hear a life as it progresses over the course of the play. But what of the converse? Most of us are about twenty years old. All of us, like Andy, are at Yale and facing an unknown future. What would it be like for a younger actor to speak the words of an older, future self? Imagine you could know everything that is to come. Isn't that terrifying?

But the play's message is ultimately a hopeful one, one that affirms the power of theater in the era of streaming, emailing, and texting. That being together is ultimately better than all of that, even letters. That liveness is when we can be our most intimate, when we can love each other best.

Sam Ahn