

SERIES OVERVIEW

INTERNMENT explores the lives of a gifted but dysfunctional Japanese American family forcibly reunited by the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

We follow Ken Niide, a brilliant surgeon forced into Camp Golden, a desolate crucible in which he confronts his country, his people, his family — and his forbidden love for his step-sister, Mie.

CONCEPT

Internment is a family drama following the struggles of the Niide family through the Japanese American Internment Camps. The Niide's are a classically tragic American family in the vein of Eugene O'Neill's Tyrone family, Arthur Miller's Loman family, or the Fishers from Six Feet Under.

WHAT INTERNMENT MEANS TO ME

INTERNMENT is my passion project. It is inspired by my father's family's, and so many other Japanese American Families', experiences during the second world war. It's an amalgam of these personal stories and the classically American family dramas written by Eugene O'Neill (the Tyrone family) and Arthur Miller (the Loman family). I firmly believe that if Miller or O'Neill were alive today they would be working in television/episodic storytelling. These are vast tragic families whose lives echo the rise and fall of American culture, that wrestle with the problems of the day, but, even more so, the eternal problems that fire our existence: how do we love, how do overcome hate, and how do we live honestly despite the need to live among others, to live in a "society".

I believe that in Internment we can tackle those very same themes in the crucible of a much ignored page of history. Normally, a writer has to devise reasons to keep characters colliding against one another in a static location — a hospital, a police station, Santa Barbara. With Internment, the crucible of an Internment Camp (a prison) not only exists, but grows hotter, as the war effort challenges our characters to choose between assimilation and extradition, between compliance and defiance, between self-abnegation and self-destruction. Drama is built on choices, hard choices, and in the camps they were manifold.

HOW IT WORKS

On an episode to episode basis, Internment will work as a family/prison drama with elements of a medical show. After struggling to escape in any manner possible, Ken Niide will (with great reluctance) become the camp's head doctor. He'll simultaneously stand up for the concerns of people in the camp and battle with his family and community — who find him far too Americanized for their taste. Ken is deeply conflicted

about his family and the Japanese American Community as a whole — he is a self hating Japanese American leading man.

THE SETTING

During the war 10 Japanese American Internment camps called relocation centers were built and operated by the U.S. government. These camps were built to hold most of the 110,000 Japanese civilians that were incarcerated during the war. I'm creating an 11th relocation center, Camp Golden. It will be a composite of many of the other camps, but will be most similar to Manzanar and Tule Lake. Like the other centers, it will be placed in arid wasteland in Indian Country. I'm also putting an alkali cesspool nearby (as an homage to Kurosawa's Drunken Angel).

CHARACTERS

KEN NIIDE – Speaking of Drunken Angel, I imagine Ken to be two parts Toshiro Mifune and one part Don Draper. He's large, six feet tall and imposing with a sharp tongue and a quick and sometimes violent temper. Ken is a surgeon and something of a genius. He has utterly rejected his family and community, even going so far as to change his last name from Ishikawa to Niide. He works for White Memorial Hospital and will no longer even treat Japanese patients.

Ken sleeps around a lot but isn't married and has never managed to sustain a relationship... not a normal one, anyway. Some people blame his inability to lay down real roots on his parents' leaving him behind in the U.S. for ten-years to be raised by the neighbors, the Niide's, while they traveled around Japan. Certainly this long absence had its effects, but the Niide's aren't exactly the picture of loving stewardship when they're back home. In truth, it was the arrival of Ken's sister, Mie, that truly changed him. Their forbidden love is the spark that lit the powder keg that is Ken's family.

The first season deals with Ken being thrown into the world of the Internment Camps (specifically, the camp that Ken's father -- whom he hates -- runs gangster-like from the inside). Ken grapples with his distaste for his own people and chafes under his father's rule. He also hides a secret: he's still in love with Mie after all these years. And she, now married, is still in love with him.

As secrets from Ken and his family's past swirl, the US Government forces the internees to sign a loyalty oath that forces the young men of the camp to either choose to enter the army or be sent away to a camp for "agitators". Ken ultimately finds himself fighting the Nazis as part of the 100th battalion (the most decorated battalion in US History). Mie and her father Kazuo try to hold down the home front as protests brew, and infighting runs rampant, and Mie's husband Wade is sent to the "agitator's" camp. When Ken returns from war, a wounded shell shocked man, can he and Mie finally find happiness? Can their family ever mend its broken heart? Or will history forever deny them?

MIE NAKANO (NEE ISHIKAWA) – Ken's sister, a year younger than him. She was adopted by the Niide's during their travels through Japan. She and Sumi are the Issei

(first generation Japanese) in the family. She seems to be the picture of demure, self-effacing wife, but there's always something roiling beneath the surface. Still waters run deep. Mie struggles to rekindle her relationship with Ken while still playing the part of the proper Japanese wife and daughter. Ultimately the dichotomy becomes too much for her and she eventually attempts to leave the camp on her own... until she discovers she is pregnant.

SUMIKO ISHIKAWA – Ken and Mie's mother. Tough and insane—like a fox. Sumiko doles her love out with equal parts of invective – but she does love her children, natural and adopted. Sumiko has lived a difficult life and likes to see other's struggle as a result. She speaks only Japanese when around Caucasians – even though she is thoroughly fluent in English. Over the course of the first season she struggles to rebuild her family – despite the fact that no-one else in the family shares her wishes.

KAZUO ISHIKAWA – Ken and Mie's father. Kazuo is fierce, headstrong, and, contrary to many Japanese, an individualist at heart. He hails from a once proud Samurai family and carries the power and burden of that history with him always. He plays by no rules and lives in a gray area of criminal activity and proper business. Kazuo struggles to create and maintain order in the camp – no matter the cost – securing power for himself.

WADE NAKANO– Mie's husband. A good if not terribly bright man. He ran a local Japanese bank before the internment set in. He loves Mie deeply but is troubled by their inability to conceive a child. Wade begins to realize that something is amiss between Mie and Ken, and eventually becomes a Japanese Nationalist in order to define and destroy himself.

DIRECTOR GORDON HEAD – the administrative power of the camp. A spit polished man that treats the camp as his opportunity to move up. Seems the very model of a handsome politician with a future but, ultimately, he's a soulless bureaucrat. He sees the Japanese merely as items to be moved from one place to another. He neither loves nor hates them.

EMMITT O'CONNOR – a soldier in Golden. A clever man and sympathetic and smart enough to not trust Kazuo or his gang. At the outset of the camp (the pilot) he will still be caught up in the "yellow peril" that is gripping the country, but he will be less fervent in his beliefs and fears upon meeting the Japanese himself, especially Mie.

THE BIG SECRET

Ken's darkest secret is his love for Mie – and hers for him. It is not fraternal in nature. This is understandable given the fact that they did not meet until they were already in their early teens and that Mie is not a blood relative – but the cultural mores of both the time and the Japanese people would never accept this love (nor is it acceptable now). This is why Ken left but it is not what fractured the family – the family was already broken to begin with. But this was a hell of a spark to light the powder keg.

TONE, MISSION, and PURPOSE

INTERNMENT'S tone lives in the demilitarized zone between America's classic dramatists and that of Deadwood and The Sopranos — that mix of high and low, humor and tragedy.

What INTERNMENT tackles on a production level that is specific and unique, is that it focuses a grounded but iconic lens on both Asian American experience and Asian American actors.

Having worked in the theatre, I am deeply familiar with actors of Asian descent whose talents go ignored and unnoticed. This is a tragedy to me. That tomorrow's Marlon Brando should be relegated to always playing assistant medical examiner or pizza boy because his last name is hard to pronounce, is a tragedy to our industry. And it is one that I hope to address head-on in the casting and development of this project and these characters.

Internment's characters, particularly its leads, will be deeply flawed, and deeply human. This is not a story of victims and perpetrators. It is Drama with a capital D. That we get a bit of history lesson on the side is all well and good, but it isn't the primary goal.

When Francis Ford Coppola set out to cast The Godfather, Italian American Actors still changed their last names. But when he cast Al Pacino, and introduced the Corleone family to America, America changed. Soon these actors and filmmakers embraced their family histories, and so did the country and the arts were all the better for it. There is a direct line between The Godfather and The Sopranos. And, as we know, The Sopranos was the birth of prestige television. I hope to bring light to a not often explored area of American Experience, not merely for the betterment of Asian Americans, but for the betterment of our art and our industry.

PILOT OVERVIEW

It's 1942, and the internment of all Americans of Japanese descent on the West Coast of the United States is well under way. We meet Ken Niide, a brilliant surgeon who has rejected his ancestry and his family, as he is dragged out of a love nest in Little Tokyo and sent to an INTERNMENT CAMP in the hinterlands of Central California.

In the camp, Ken discovers the family he thought he had left behind: his father, Kazuo, a powerful man with criminal ties that is slowly taking over the Camp; his mother, Sumiko, a mad woman that spends her days praying that the Emperor of Japan defeat the

Yankee Dogs and smites their “yellow slaves”; and his step-sister, Mie, who is unhappily married to her sweet, mild-mannered loser husband, Wade.

Ken desperately tries to meet the camp’s director, Gordon Head. He makes the case to anyone that will listen that he should be freed from the camp: Ken owns a farm outside the exclusion zone — outside the line that divides Japanese Americans that will be imprisoned, and those that will keep their lands and livelihoods.

This argument falls on deaf ears, however. And soon, Ken is drawn into the drama of the camp:

FIRST a crazy old internee named Watanabe is shot by an overzealous camp guard, Reggie. Ken tries to save Watanabe, but the last minute surgery isn’t enough to revive the old man.

THEN, out of guilt, Reggie shoots himself in the foot. And now Ken must decide whether to let Reggie die, and please the people he has rejected, or to save Reggie and please the people that have rejected him.

Meanwhile, Kazuo builds power within the camp by starting a secret sake trade and by stirring up a riot when Watanabe is murdered by Reggie. When Ken discovers Kazuo in the camp, Kazuo brutally rejects him, threatening to kill Ken if he comes around asking for help again. As far as Kazuo is concerned, Ken is no longer a member of their family.

Which is exactly the opposite reaction of Ken’s step-sister, Mie. Mie was adopted by Kazuo and Sumiko when they returned to Japan without Ken. When Mie finds Ken in the Camp, a lifetime’s conflict and yearning is brought back to the surface and we learn the great secret that tore this once auspicious family apart — Ken and Mie are deeply, desperately in love with each other. A love that challenges family, tradition, identity, history, and a love that may very well destroy them.

Phinny’s BIO

Phinneas Kiyomura is a half-Japanese/half-Irish, playwright, father, recovering actor, and former skate punk from Long Beach, CA -- which means he’s never been able to check just one box on anything, not even a census form. He cut his artistic teeth in the theatre where he learned through blood, sweat, and tears (all of them real) how to breathe life into art.

His critically acclaimed plays (Lydia in Bed, Figure 8, Ariana, etc...) have been produced at Theatre of NOTE, Padua Playwrights and Sacred Fools, among others.

He is a FIND Screenwriters Lab Fellow, an ABC Disney Writers Lab Fellow and was most recently staff writer on TWISTED (ABC Family). He will appear as an actor in upcoming features KILL, ME DEADLY and WHEN WE LEAVE.

INTERNMENT is truly his passion project, inspired by his family's, and so many other Japanese American families' experiences during the Second World War. He and his wife have a tame cat and a wild four-year-old.