Citizens Divided: Silk Road Rising inspires an exhibit on our shameful legacy of Japanese American incarceration.

While American history bears many scars, few are as ugly and as little known as those left by Executive Order 9066. Issued in response to the Pearl Harbor bombing, this Order allowed the American government to round up and detain Japanese American citizens in internment camps.

The Alphawood Gallery details this traumatic event with their new exhibit, “Then They Came for Me.” This exhibit was inspired by a book, “Un-American: The Incarceration of Japanese Americans During World War II” by photographer and author Richard Cahan.

At the book launch event, Cahan contacted Silk Road Rising’s Executive Director Malik Gillani. “You and your work are part of the reason I wrote ‘Un-American,’” he said. “I’m so inspired by what you do.”

The author went on to say: “One of Silk Road’s early plays was about a woman at an Arkansas internment camp. I had no idea there were camps so far to the east. It was this detail that sparked my interest.”

Storytelling inspired Richard to look more closely at a shameful moment in our cultural history. What resulted was not only a book, but an entire exhibition.

You never know how the seeds we sow in the present will blossom as future fruit. For your continued investment in our storytelling, thank you!
At Westcott Elementary School, in Chicago’s Auburn Gresham neighborhood, you will meet Dr. Jenny Andrews and a talented staff dedicated to student learning—all despite their lacking a gym, music, or art teacher.

This fall, Silk Road Rising helped bridge this arts learning gap by teaching playwriting to 7th graders with our Empathic Playwriting Intensive Course (EPIC).

**When first presented with EPIC, Dr. Andrews sighed with relief: “Yes, this is exactly what our 7th graders need.”**

School partners typically have specific needs. Westcott had an especially unusual request: could we send a male teaching artist?

You see, every teacher at Westcott is female. And for middle school students, caught between childhood and young adulthood, the principal felt that having a male presence in the classroom could add a new dimension to student learning.

Veteran EPIC teaching artist, Levi Holloway, was thus assigned.

In addition to a high-quality arts education, Levi has provided these students—especially young men—with a male role model. Such role models are crucial for students during major formative years.

Just two weeks into Levi’s residency, transformations to classroom culture were already being reported. Students were completing tasks with more excitement, and taking greater risks in ensemble-based work.

Despite the obstacles facing her school, Dr. Andrews will continue to push for her students. Thanks to your contributions in support of EPIC, Silk Road Rising remains a proud partner in her quest for student success.
In Korean, the word Yeaji means “light.” How appropriate then that the set designer who illuminated the world of Candace Chong’s “Wild Boar” should bear that name.

But when Yeaji received a letter from the INS ordering her deportation, we were devastated. Despite our efforts and the actions of a legal team, and with rehearsals just three weeks away, her specialized work visa was not renewed.

While the stage is darker for her going, our resolve to support international artists burns brighter than ever.

Amid the current political climate, it is crucial that Silk Road Rising, a globally-minded company, continues to cultivate international connections whenever possible. **Thanks to your support, we regularly employ international artists to refocus and sharpen our artistic work.**

Our commitment to diversity is also local. We cast locally and have helped to put Chicago on the map as a haven for actors of Silk Road heritage.

Take, for example, our casting process for Velina Hasu Houston’s “Tea” (2004). Only 11 Asian American actors auditioned for five main roles! Chances of being cast back then were high—most actors were actually business professionals choosing to exercise their artistic muscles.

Thirteen years later, after 35 mainstage productions and 68 staged readings, we have become a magnet for professional artists.

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Yeaji’s set design for “Wild Boar” brightening our stage.
Per the commissioning process, we are working with local musician and impresario Ronnie Malley (you may recall seeing—and hearing—his “Ziryab, the Songbird of Andalusia” on our stage in 2016) as well as award-winning African American playwright, Reginald Edmund, to shape this new musical journey.

In “Islamic Roots in the Blues” they will trace the origins of perhaps America’s most iconic musical contributions from the slave colonies of the Mississippi Delta, to the kingdoms of West Africa.

The play will explore the lasting impact of West African musical practices, rooted in traditional Sufi Muslim worship, that would evolve into the Negro spiritual, and later give way to the blues, rock and roll, even hip hop.

A student production of the play will premiere at Moraine Valley College in February 2019. We are currently in the fundraising phase, generating gifts to support a professional world premiere on our stage in Fall 2019. Thank you for supporting Silk Road Rising and making this exciting, collaborative journey possible.

Every artistic program is a collaboration between many artists. Likewise, a growing movement that supports Asian and Middle Eastern stories demands partnerships between multiple institutions.

In the true spirit of arts partnership, Silk Road Rising is collaborating with Moraine Valley Community College to develop programming that reflects Muslim American artists and their stories.

As a result of this partnership, we are leveraging a grant awarded to the College to commission an exciting new play with music: “Islamic Roots in the Blues.”