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A world in which we are linked and not ranked.  
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## New Essay-in-Progress

In Silk Road Rising's August 6, 2021 e-newsletter, Founding Co-Executive Artistic Director Jamil Khoury introduced the idea of a Polycultural Institute. He also noted that in the months to follow, he would be sharing excerpts from his new essay-in-progress titled *The Case for Polyculturalism*. Jamil is giving himself the time and space to identify and think through the ideas that will appear in the essay, and to talk them through with trusted colleagues and collaborators.

Excerpts from *The Case for Polyculturalism* will not necessarily appear in any chronological order, and will likely be revised before the final essay is released. Jamil welcomes your input as he continues to develop ideas and language.



**Polycultural**  
Institute

# *The Case for Polyculturalism*

## *by Jamil Khoury*

### **Director of Polycultural Institute**

The term “polyculturalism” was originally coined by historians Robin D. G. Kelly and Vijay Prashad. The two scholars proposed an alternative to multiculturalism that emphasized the common ground that is shared between cultures as evidenced by the interconnectedness of cultures. Polyculturalism would shed light on the mutual challenges and needs faced by cultural communities with the goal of spurring coalitional politics. The belief is that dynamic interchange between cultures propels human connectivity, and when people are connected, they’re more likely to work toward the common good.

Kelly and Prashad contend that cultures continuously evolve in relationship with one another, and that it is from within these organic alliances, that anti-racism and economic justice can most effectively be advanced. It’s not about erecting and policing borders between cultures, it’s about embracing the porosity that links cultures and the possibilities such linkages create.

To better appreciate what Silk Road Rising hopes to build with Polycultural Institute, I’ve selected the following quotes to help illustrate the politics and spirit of this endeavor. I hope you will find these quotes as poignant and relevant as I do.

“Polycultural” works better than “multicultural,” which implies that cultures are fixed, discrete entities that exist side by side—a kind of zoological approach to culture. Such a view obscures power relations, but often reifies race and gender differences. Black people were

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shores not as Africans, but as Ibo, Yoruba, Hausa, Kongo, Bambara, Mende, Mandingo, and so on. Some of our ancestors came as Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, Irish, English, Italian. And more than a few of us, in North America as well as in the Caribbean and Latin American, have Asian and Native American roots.

- Robin D. G. Kelly, "People in Me," *Colorlines Magazine* (winter 1999).

Scholars are under some obligation to...criticize the diversity model of multiculturalism and replace it with the antiracist one of polyculturalism. Culture cannot be bounded and people cannot be asked to respect "culture" as if it were an artifact, without life and complexity. Social interaction and struggle produces cultural worlds, and these are in constant, fraught formation. Our cultures are linked in more ways than we could catalog, and it is from these linkages that we hope our politics will be energized.

- Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

Who is an American and what are we to one another? We have to admit that this question is harder for us than in most other countries, because we are the world's most radical experiment in democracy, a nation of ancestral strangers that has to work to find connection even as we grow more diverse every day.

- Heather McGhee, *The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together* (New York: One World, 2021).

We need an activism of cohesion. We need an activism that doesn't separate Americans into like-minded factions but brings Americans together across tribal lines.

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I am open and I am willing  
For to be hopeless would seem so strange  
It dishonors those who go before us  
So lift me up to the light of change

- Holly Near, "I Am Willing," *Show Up*, Goldenrod Music, 2006.

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## Don't Miss *Egyptian Bride* by Fouad Teymour!

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Two storylines, separated by 3,000 years of history...

*Can established tradition be successfully upturned?*

# EGYPTIAN BRIDE

Written by Fouad Teymour  
Directed by Patrizia Acerra

Saturday, October 23  
2:00 PM CT  
ONLINE

TWITCH.TV/CHICAGODRAMATISTS

Silk Road Rising Artistic Associate Fouad Teymour's new play, *Egyptian Bride*, is receiving a virtual staged reading as part of Chicago Dramatists' ongoing *Out of the Box* festival. No reservation necessary. Just tune in Saturday, October 23 at 2:00PM CDT:

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