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*The Case for Polyculturalism* continues to reveal itself.  
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# A Polycultural Nugget Plus Three Shows to Feast Upon

**Excerpt from**

***The Case for  
Polyculturalism***

**A new essay-in-progress  
by Jamil Khoury**

If I had to summarize the history of humankind in a couple of words, "cultural interchange" most immediately comes to mind. The evolution of our species is defined, in large part, by migration and interaction. In tandem with our circumstances and environments, human beings collectively produce culture, and these expressions of culture tend to elude "purity" and "singularity." Cultures are receptive and absorptive: Sometimes they're

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hermetically sealed borders, try as some may. People exchange knowledge, practices, beliefs, and art forms directly and indirectly, knowingly and unknowingly; a culture is the sum total of all the interchanges it has experienced to date.

This is not to suggest that cultural interchange is always positive or mutually beneficial—far from it. Conditions of oppression and distress have been known to generate powerful artistic expression; great art is often a response to trauma. But for the polycultural project to succeed, cultural interchange can not exist under threat of violence. It cannot be forced or coerced. Cultural interchange is about learning, sharing, discovering, and adapting. It's premised on mutuality and respect, which is why polyculturalists need to be vigilant in distinguishing between cultural appropriation and cultural appreciation, between colonizing culture and honoring culture.

In today's excerpt, I'll examine the phenomenon of cultural appropriation, and in the following excerpt, I'll address cultural appreciation. The distinctions are vast and should inform our actions and choices.

At its core, appropriation is an act of stealing, deception, and misrepresentation. It's taking that which is not yours, profiting from it, and denying its rightful owners the benefits of their creativity, labor, and patrimony. A culture that is being appropriated from experiences harm on material, political, psychological, and spiritual levels. To fetishize or parody cultural practices and aesthetics is to propagate stereotypes that reinforce racism and perpetuate inequality. Not surprisingly, the cultures most vulnerable to appropriation are those that have been historically persecuted and marginalized, usually by a dominant culture keen on maintaining and expanding its own power.

Ultimately, appropriation is about asymmetrical power and the abuses it affords. Typically, we can trace it to impact and intent. If the intent is self-serving and the impact is harmful, chances are it's appropriation. Mimicking or mocking a culture without consent, often for personal gain, and with an added veneer of justification, are telltale signs. "I know your culture better than you know your culture. Or, at least, I can market your culture better

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ment that is sanitized by airs of authority and special knowledge, or an act of plagiarism rationalized by one's "superior" ability to sell. Once a culture has been looted of its intellectual properties, it loses ownership that produces wealth and foundations upon which to evolve, not to mention dignity and identity.



**Polycultural  
Institute**

## Community Spotlight



## *Running* by Danny Pudi

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## Produced by Hypokrit Productions, East West Players, and EnActe Arts

A new film written by Danny Pudi (*Community*, *Mythic Quest*), *Running* is a love letter to Chicago that follows Danny as he sets out to uncover the story of his estranged father. Piecing together mementos, stories from his dad's old friends, and hard conversations with his mother, Pudi starts on a mission to solve the puzzle of his father and finds himself instead on a complex, funny, and vulnerable journey of self-discovery and acceptance through his hometown.

[Learn More and Purchase a Ticket Here](#)

**Use code CHITOWNRUNNING for 25% off!**

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## *This Is Only a Test* by Eric Reyes Loo

**Playing Now through March 12, 2022**

**Produced by Broken Nose Theatre**

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It could happen anywhere, at any time, and the faculty at Washington High have decided to take "being prepared" to a whole new level. Through a series of Active Shooter Drills, their students will be trained on how to fight back. But as they're asked to quell violence by responding violently, four teenagers begin to wonder: if we're so prepared, why do we feel even more unsafe? Directed by Toma Tavares Langston, this brand-new play asks us to consider the realities that we're leaving our future generations to defend themselves against.

[Purchase a Ticket Here](#)

# Sally Deering



**Playing Now through March 13, 2022**

**Produced by PrideArts**

*When There Are Nine* takes place largely in the mind of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and imagines how she might have recalled pivotal moments in her life and the challenges she faced. Deering's script shows Justice Ginsburg's deep concern for the welfare of others and captures the wit and humor for which she was known. The play vividly documents Justice Ginsburg's enormous contributions to the advancement of equality in the United States.

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