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Negotiating Ethnic and American Identities in Contemporary Multiethnic American Drama

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NEGOTIATING ETHNIC AND AMERICAN IDENTITIES IN CONTEMPORARY
MULTIETHNIC AMERICAN DRAMA

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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We hereby approve the dissertation of

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Title: Negotiating Ethnic and American Identities in Contemporary Multiethnic American Drama

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Some of the critical discourse concerning American identity and ethnic identity has tended to be represented as an inherent contradiction. Such contradiction has been articulated in terms of a hyphenated identity, which is a negative representation that is both assimilationist and separatist. Unlike this approach, this dissertation focuses on showing the positive role played by ethnic American individuals who successfully negotiate their ethnic, American, and personal identities and that the unease linked to such double consciousness shows that hyphenated identity challenges binary oppositions and instead suggests the need for acknowledging the “in-betweenness” of this position. Therefore, this dissertation studies the positivity in the individual’s connection to his community and heritage and how this connection could be compatible with the progressive definition of Americanness as multiculturalism and heterogeneous that resists exclusionism and separatism. In other words, this dissertation refuses the view that hyphenated identities are unstable by showing that such individuals do not need to choose one side of their identity over the other. Rather, the hyphenated individuals can successfully negotiate their identity to achieve balance between conflicting selves.

However, this dissertation studies the complexity and the multidimensional nature of this process of identity negotiation which crosscuts with race, class, and gender. Therefore, my dissertation focuses on the interconnectivity of race, class, and gender and how ethnic Americans developed a strategy of working through their community and connecting to their heritage as a

way to resist these different types of oppressions, making a balance between their ethnic, American, and personal identities. This theoretical approach enables me to inform the complexity of identity negotiation for ethnic Americans in a more comprehensive and relevant way than other theoretical approaches, which focus more on the binary opposition and binary antagonisms that obscure the need by ethnic individuals to work as a community to resist oppression practiced against them regardless, of their personal differences. This theoretical framework can be true to ethnic Americans' reality and shared experience with oppression and hierarchy in their multidimensional forms.