

Neither Japanese Nor American: Identity and Citizenship in John Okada's *No-No Boy*

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After a century-and-a-half of Trans-Pacific emigration and decades' worth of academic writing on the matter, Asian-American identity is still a difficult concept to define. As opposed to whites, against whom all other ethnic groups are inevitably compared, and African-Americans, whose roots to the country begin with the slave trade, Asian Americans have no great narrative of their own. Instead, what identity they have managed to generate has come about through a process of negation, by privileging what Asian-American identity isn't over what it is.

For years, Asian American identity was most simply defined as non-white, as an offshoot of blackness. In his book *Race, Rights and the Asian American Experience*, Angelo Ancheta chronicles the phenomenon in which Asian Americans, rather than being treated as human beings of equal rights, rather than being treated as their own respective ethnic group, merely fell victim to the same racist legislation already levied against blacks. To prove his point, he brings up the case of *People v. Hall*, which maintained that no Chinese person could testify against a white American due to an in-force statute that already prohibited the testimony of blacks (5). Furthering this parallel between Asian and African Americans, Ancheta also references the case of *Gong Lum v. Rice*, which upheld the constitutionality of sending Chinese school children to separate schools twenty-seven years before *Brown v. Board of Education*. As far as the court systems were concerned, Ancheta observes, "yellow equaled black, and neither equaled white" (5).

The Chinese were not alone in this regard. The incoming Japanese found themselves in a similar situation, and they were thereby forced to achieve citizenship in unorthodox and creative ways. In one particularly noteworthy case, *Ozawa v. United States*, a Japanese man tried to argue that he should be considered white based primarily on skin color (Ancheta 6). This was not only a subversive take on the commonly-held notions of race and ethnicity, but it also served the adverse purpose of reaffirming the status quo, as it suggested that being Japanese automatically disqualified one from citizenship, and in turn, one had to claim whiteness via any loophole possible. Ozawa's efforts, however, ultimately proved unsuccessful. But one must ask, why is whiteness so seemingly at odds with being Japanese?

As we see in John Okada's 1957 novel, *No-No Boy*, the most vivid illustration of this divide is in the treatment of Japanese people during and after World War II. Predominantly viewed as irreversibly foreign and antagonistic, Japanese Americans had to endure life in internment. This was initiated by Executive Order 9066, which removed 110,000 Japanese inhabitants, two-thirds of whom were actually citizens, from their homes and placed them in camps where they were closely monitored (Yogi 63). From there, all Japanese men of service age were forced to complete a loyalty questionnaire implemented by the War Relocation Authority – or WRA – that required them to declare allegiance to the United States or face imprisonment. It was in providing negative responses to the following two questions that a second-generation Japanese American, henceforth called a Nisei, earned the moniker of no-no boy:

27.) Are you willing to serve in the armed forces of the United States on combat duty, wherever ordered?

28.) Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attacks by foreign or domestic forces, and foreswear any form of allegiance to the Japanese emperor, or any other foreign government, power, or organization? (Yogi 65)

Thus, the WRA questionnaire ultimately caused a rift within the Japanese community. Many first-generation Japanese maintained strong ties to Japan while their children, the Nisei, knew no other cultural affiliation than America, but the divide wasn't merely generational. Those dubbed no-no boys were seen as nothing more than an albatross for the Nisei community to bear. This viewpoint is particularly upheld – and enforced – by those Japanese of the Nisei generation who answered affirmatively on the WRA questionnaire, proving themselves to be unwaveringly loyal to America and willing to fight on its behalf.

The crux of these conflicts rests ultimately on how Americans outside of the community – particularly whites, since they alone exercised socio-political control at this point in history – viewed *all* Japanese persons. The war veterans of the Nisei generation craved overdue recognition as fellow Americans that they felt they earned in the war. But their wartime efforts, they soon realized, mattered little in post-war society, and because of this, Nisei veterans adopted hatred toward their own in yet another attempt to earn acknowledgment as fellow Americans. For their part, the no-no boys want the exact same thing as the men who served in the military. But unlike the veterans, who believed they only needed to be recognized by white America, the no-no boys had to also somehow earn the respect of the war veterans, men who wanted nothing more than to banish them from the community. It is out of this tension and anger that Okada's *No-No Boy* emerges.

A State of Emergency... A State of Emergence?

A cornerstone of Asian American literature, *No-No Boy* chronicles the homecoming of one Nisei individual who could not answer affirmatively to the WRA questionnaire without feeling as if he was abandoning his ethnic heritage. Ichiro Yamada, the novel's protagonist and sometimes narrator, walks the streets of Seattle with understandable apprehension and anxiety. Ichiro's guilt is two-fold: first for his refusal to enlist and declare sole allegiance to America, and second for Japan's attacks on Pearl Harbor. The latter should

have no bearing on Ichiro personally, but due to a public perception that sees him as interchangeable with the bombers of Pearl Harbor, he spends the entire narrative attempting to repent. But how warm of a welcome does Ichiro expect if he himself cannot enunciate an American identity on his own behalf?

One of the primary ways to affirm individual identity, according to Homi K. Bhabha, is to simply enunciate it. Cultural difference, as Bhabha writes, “is an enunciative category; opposed to relativistic notions of cultural diversity, or the exoticism of the ‘diversity’ of cultures” (85). I interpret this to mean that for national subjects who find themselves outside of cultural identity norms, they must not only enunciate their difference for themselves but do so in a way that counteracts any attempts by the dominant culture to enunciate an identity for them. I will go into greater detail about this troublesome negotiation between the dominant culture and the Nisei in the next part of this essay, but I want to begin by first discussing Ichiro’s attempts to enunciate his cultural difference – his *identity* – on his own terms.

On his way home, Ichiro passes by a group of African American men who have moved into the neighborhood during internment. They taunt him with a chant of “Jap-boy, To-ki-yo; Jap-boy, To-ki-yo” (5), illustrating the common attitude toward the Japanese as irreversibly foreign. Even to black Americans, a group already so accustomed to racism and oppression, there is no difference between the bombers of Pearl Harbor and an American citizen like Ichiro. Ichiro takes note of this, describing the taunts from the black men as “[p]ersecution in the drawl of the persecuted” (5). These men have not only replaced the Japanese residents in the neighborhood but simultaneously represent the dominant ideologies that now hold them down. They cannot challenge the dominant ideology to achieve social equality for their own racial group, but they can certainly assimilate in other ways, primarily by participating in the oppression and ridicule of those beneath them on the racial hierarchy.

Ichiro’s fellow Nisei take a similar approach. Eto Minato, an old acquaintance, stands beside him on a street corner, dressed in his green army-fatigue trousers to show off his military service. What begins as a friendly exchange between the two immediately sours when Eto realizes that Ichiro is a no-no boy. To Eto, Ichiro not only betrayed the United States with his responses but acted against the common good of the entire community, which continues to struggle for recognition as loyal American citizens, an impossible enough task without supposed traitors like Ichiro standing among them.

Ichiro may excuse Eto’s response, finding “a release to his own naked tension” (4) in Eto’s anger, but the novel itself is hardly as forgiving. Except Eto’s military attire, nothing truly separates him from Ichiro. Would the black men on Jackson Street have curbed their taunts had Eto passed by them instead? Doubtful. *No-No Boy* remains just as much a statement against Nisei like Eto, who would rather spit on their fellow Japanese in an attempt to elevate their own statuses as Americans, as it is against the socio-political power structure (i.e. whites) that wrongly persecuted them in the first place.

In either instance – in dealing with the taunts of the black men or with Eto – Ichiro cannot defend himself from accusations by simply declaring himself an American. The

difficulty he experiences admitting his no-no boy status is understandable, but his inability to declare himself an American is baffling – especially since that is what he desires most. Never is his internal conflict more evident than when he finally arrives home where his traditionalist mother, who still insists on a Japanese victory, welcomes him. In her son's refusal to serve, Ma sees her own unwavering loyalty to Japan. Ichiro, however, is far more divided on the matter. He thinks to himself:

[W]e were Japanese with Japanese feelings and Japanese pride and Japanese thoughts because it was all right to be Japanese and feel and think all the things that Japanese do even if we lived in America. Then there came a time when I was only half Japanese because one is not born in American and raised in American and taught in America... without becoming American and loving it. (15-16)

He wants to be recognized as an American so badly, yet he cannot extend that same recognition to himself. Instead, he references his American upbringing and education as if they are somehow separate from him, each of them superior to himself as a whole.

The novel also mentions the fact that the United States was at the same time at war with Italy and Germany, but citizens of Italian or German ancestry, it illustrates, could blend back into the populace with greater ease than Ichiro, whose crime against the country becomes known after one glance at his face. Due to his physical traits, he is immediately set apart as an inassimilable foreigner and automatically suspected of treason. Gary, an old friend and fellow no-no boy, states that those who enlisted, however better they feel compared to no-no boys, will still find

themselves getting passed up for jobs by white fellows not quite so bright but white. They'll take a trip up to some resort, thinking this is God's green land of democracy for which I killed a dozen Krauts, and get kicked in the face with the unfortunate mistake about the reservation story because he'd signed the letter Ohara and the guy at the resort thought it was good old Irish O'Hara. (227)

Here, Okada openly addresses the arbitrariness of race relations in America, where something as serendipitous as an apostrophe makes all the difference. Recognition as a fellow American will never be extended to the Japanese. Ohara, a Japanese citizen, cannot amount to the good old Irish O'Hara, no matter how many Krauts he killed on duty or how vehemently he pledged allegiance to America. This is a stark contrast to the treatment of citizens of German or Italian ancestry. Okada describes the presiding judge in Ichiro's court case as an "Italian [with] a German last name" (32), explicitly proving this point. This detail becomes even more significant when we consider that this is the only description we are given of the judge's appearance.

Ichiro fails to realize that his position in post-war America is no different than those same Nisei who exert the painstaking efforts to torment him. He cannot bring himself to articulate – even to himself – that he is an American citizen and one worthy of recognition as such. His status as a no-no boy not only affects how others within and outside the Japanese community view him, but, as evidenced by his constant internal back-and-forth, also distorts how he views himself.

Emi, who blossoms into a close friend as the novel progresses, sees right through Ichiro, though. She implores him to recall how proud they felt as young students singing “The Star Spangled Banner” and pledging allegiance to the flag at school assemblies. She wants Ichiro to realize that his mistake is “no bigger than the mistake [his] country made” (96) against him, but in the process, she ignores the simple fact that the United States possesses much more power than Ichiro, leaving Ichiro to bear the brunt of harsh consequences for his mistake whereas the United States can easily proceed into the future, unscathed, for its treatment of the Japanese.

The topic of Ichiro’s “mistake” ultimately concludes when he shrugs off Emi’s efforts by stating, quite matter-of-factly: “It was different then” (96). Spurred on by what effect her words might yet have on him, Emi responds “Only because you think so” (96). But she seems to place full blame on Ichiro for his predicament. Things are as they are, she is stating, solely because he “thinks so.” She not only overlooks the reality of white racism that Ichiro is up against, but also the splintered and bullying Nisei community that refuses to welcome him home, to fight on his behalf. She means well, but her efforts are misleading and steeped in ignorance.

She is undeniably the type of character, though, that 1950s readers were drawn to: a minority woman who still believes in the American Dream, who is willing to overlook the past for a brighter future. However, Okada doesn’t seem to know how to deal with Emi’s perspective, perhaps having it thrust upon him by possible publishers, and it shows in his characterization of her, one-dimensional at best. She comes across as nothing more than the wholesome, patriotic woman helping Ichiro realize his American-ness, but since she is so criminally underdeveloped as a character, suggesting Okada’s lack of commitment in her creation, how seriously can Ichiro – or the readers – take her encouragement?

The text itself illustrates that if Nisei identity should be defined through what it is not (i.e. *not* white, *not* black, *not* even American), all Nisei who enlisted in the military, such as Eto and Bull, would insist that their identity be non-no-no boy, as well. The veterans’ attempt to remove the no-no boys from the community is a goal that, although affecting Ichiro in the most negative way imaginable (since it pertains to his exclusion by departure or death), is one he consistently supports. Since he cannot prove his American-ness to himself, lacks the ability to enunciate it even in his thoughts and wants nothing to do with being a Japanese loyalist like his mother, he sees no further purpose to his life. He admits as much when he decides that he would happily trade places with Kenji, a pre-wartime friend who lost a leg in combat. In an attempt to prove that Ichiro’s troubles (unlike his own) may eventually be overcome, Kenji explains the doomed future he faces. Ichiro, however, remains impervious to his argument, opting to trade place with the doomed Kenji rather than live a life of constant struggle and inner turmoil: “Kenji had two years, maybe a lifetime if the thing that was chewing away at him suddenly stopped. But he, Ichiro, had stopped living two years ago” (64).

Ichiro ceased living when he failed to capitalize on his opportunity to prove his loyalty and serve in the military. To Ichiro, military service precedes American-ness for all Japanese citizens of service age. He remains oblivious to the fact that these are the terms of

Americanization that his fellow Nisei also want him to subscribe to since it bolsters their own claims of American-ness, when in reality they all remain interchangeable in the eyes of everyone outside of their ethnic community.

Yogi points to the final scene as proof that America, although not as Ichiro imagined, is still within reach (74). However, the ending, purposefully ambiguous, leaves Ichiro's future very much in question. As he leaves the bar, he is said to be chasing "that faint and elusive insinuation of promise as it continued to take shape in mind and in heart" (251). We are led to believe, through Okada's suggestive prose, that it is only a matter of time until that promise of America is realized. But before this, Ichiro is said to be "thinking, searching, thinking and probing," revealing the amount of effort he must exert in simply *pursuing* this "faint and elusive insinuation" (252). Although we must ultimately understand the long process ahead of Ichiro, we cannot overlook the fact that by novel's end, he is still unable to declare himself an American. The promise of that moment is there, but it is presumptuous to assume that it will be realized beyond that.

Although Yogi and others have concluded that the ending leaves readers with a sense of hope, Ichiro himself is far more ambivalent about the matter. He isn't sure what he is feeling, but he refrains from calling it hope. The narrator asks on Ichiro's behalf, "A glimmer of hope – was that it?" (250). In this closing scene, Ichiro is seemingly convincing *himself* that what he feels is hope (thereby assuring readers in the process), because what else could it possibly be? "It was there," the narrator continues, "someplace" (250). Here, Okada directs Ichiro away from a hybridized cultural identity and instead propels him solely toward an affiliation with America - all without resolving the issues of identity and citizenship that the novel brings under discussion in the first place. The narrative ends with the conflict between the no-no boys and the Nisei veterans culminating in violence. The no-no boy Freddie attempts to flee, and in doing so, loses control of his car and dies. Bull, the veteran, asserts to anyone around that he is glad for what happened before he sobs uncontrollably. We leave Ichiro, not long after his failed attempts to console Bull, wandering aimlessly into the night, neither heading home nor initiating wholeness for himself or for the Nisei community. He is, it is said, merely in pursuit.

Expanding upon one of Walter Benjamin's central points in his essay "Theses On the Philosophy of History," Bhabha contends that a state of emergency, like the situation faced by the Nisei in post-WWII America, always yields a state of emergence (59). This struggle, Bhabha writes, "not only changes the direction of [history], but challenges its historicist idea of time as a progressive, ordered whole" (59). Thus, Ichiro's emerging identity – presented in the novel strictly along Manichean lines as either American or Japanese, trustworthy citizen or suspicious foreigner – would thrust him beyond the wartime tensions that he feels inherently exists between the American and Japanese communities, as well as within the Japanese community itself. Unfortunately, though, Ichiro's emergency yields no "emergence" since he himself cannot articulate his own emergence as either Japanese or American by the novel's end, and cannot seem to think along the lines necessary to achieve the hybridized identity of Japanese-American. To him, these terms remain exclusive at best and at worst fatally antagonistic.

Individual Identity vs. Social Type

In his 2000 essay, "Assumed Identities," David Palumbo-Liu differentiates between "identity," granted at the individual level, and "social type," the recognition bestowed upon entire groups of people. He explains that when the line between the two is blurred or completely overlooked, the parties involved are doomed to experience "profoundly destructive outcomes" (767).

The "destructive outcomes" Palumbo-Liu references manifest themselves two-fold in *No-No Boy*, the first of these being how white Americans view and treat Nisei individuals. It is, after all, the perception of those *outside* of the Japanese community that most affects how successful the Nisei will be in their pursuit for recognition. As such, this particular "destructive outcome" leads to the second: how members of the Nisei generation come to view themselves. Almost all characters in Okada's text are guilty of subscribing to a definition of "American" that will forever exclude them to a certain point since they will never be white and of European descent. The guiltiest of parties – and one may argue that this is because they feel that they have the best claim at American-ness – are the veterans. And it is in their insistence of American-ness that they turn against their own.

The Nisei we encounter in *No-No Boy* remain too splintered to challenge the dominant culture's notions of identity and citizenship. Thus, Ichiro's state becomes analogous to that of his entire generation. Even someone like Kenji, the only war veteran we encounter in the text who does not partake in no-no boy persecution, has no consoling words regarding the state of Japanese people in America. He says: "Go someplace where there isn't another Jap within a thousand miles. Marry a white girl or a Negro or an Italian or even a Chinese. Anything but a Japanese. After a few generations of that, you've got the thing beat. Am I making sense?" (164). Kenji's advice is to simply leave it alone. There will be no change in the foreseeable future of how whites view their Japanese counterparts. Similarly, there will be no difference in how the veterans, who blindly subscribe to white America's definition of citizenship, treat the no-no boys.

Palumbo-Liu explains how frequently (and with remarkable ease) social type can supplant individual recognition. To most other Americans, the Nisei veterans – despite their badges of honor for having served – remain one and the same with the no-no boys who they detest so much. And in a narrative where racist, white America is entirely non-existent, the Nisei veterans believe it is perfectly in their place to act as substitutes; as such, they can determine what the Nisei "social type" should *become*. The veterans cannot dictate how white Americans will view them. Having served in the war, proving beyond a doubt where their loyalties lie, the veterans believe that their only true power rests in how the Nisei community can present itself going forward.

This adds to the barriers already faced by Ichiro, who repeatedly proves himself incapable of declaring himself Japanese or American at a time before it was socially acceptable to be both. Moreover, as Daniel Y. Kim points out, Ichiro also returns home from imprisonment with a sense of compromised masculinity, all because he never enlisted (69). But this is faulty logic on the part of Ichiro. The veterans, for all their "brutal, chauvinistic,

and unthinking” (Kim 70) mannerisms, will never achieve the masculinity they value most: namely the one afforded to members of the dominant culture, where being in the war (as well as being white) translates to a manliness that no Nisei can ever fully grasp. This argument, as Kim presents it, also explains the ambiguous ending we encounter. Since the Nisei men are doomed to be unsatisfied both in their pursuit for American-ness and western masculinity, it should make perfect sense that the narrative should yield no resolution for Ichiro or any other Nisei character.

Throughout the text, we glimpse instances of the veterans essentially washing their hands of their no-no boy counterparts. In the closing scene, Bull declares “I wasn’t fightin’ my friggin’ war for shits like you” (247, author’s emphasis). This reveals how Bull’s military service was for his own good alone and not for the benefit of the Japanese or American communities. We can easily argue that the Nisei veterans didn’t take anyone else into account until after the war ended, when it became clear that their military service wasn’t sufficient and that more would be needed for them to achieve the recognition they craved.

But in fighting against Japan, the country of his ancestry – and one may certainly deduce, given the nature of both Kenji’s and Ichiro’s family, the likely country of his parents’ childhood – was it truly Bull’s war he was fighting? As Ichiro acknowledges throughout his monologues, the war pitted the half of him that was American against the half of him that was Japanese, an observation altogether lost on Bull, who not only upholds the racist status quo in his treatment of the no-no boys, but insists on partial ownership of a war effort that was forced upon him. Would he have enlisted had he not been interned by the government? If not, is he any less American?

“Jap,” as we see in the text, is the harshest label for many Nisei. For them, no easier choice exists than deciding between being Japanese or American. Their decision just so happens to not be enough. It requires recognition from Americans outside their ethnic community, more specifically whites since they alone comprised the socio-political power structure at this point in history, but the only recognition the Nisei receive is that of social type, of Jap, unworthy of even living in America, let alone being recognized as fellow citizens.

Judith Butler has argued that before recognition may be extended, the individual must first fulfill the qualifications of being a subject (2). Although she relates this to her ruminations on gender, I find that it easily translates to the themes of race and identity that Okada tackles in *No-No Boy*. The Nisei struggle for recognition is doomed, since following what Butler points out, no Nisei individual is first acknowledged as being worthy. They do not “fulfill the qualifications” of being acknowledged as American, since within the world that the novel depicts, one cannot look Japanese and claim American-ness. And in Ichiro’s case, one certainly cannot refuse to enlist and claim American-ness, either.

But, as both Butler and Okada argue, the world is not nearly as clean-cut as any paradigm would indicate. Race, much like gender in Butler’s argument, is a social construct, which maintains a strict set of guidelines “inscribed on anatomically differentiated bodies, where those bodies are understood as passive recipients of an inexorable cultural law” (Butler 11). In *No-No Boy*, we witness the shedding of passivity on the part of all Nisei who

refuse to be nothing more than receptacles to oppression. Their relinquished passivity, however, is ultimately for naught since, lacking the organization and social power to turn against their true oppressors, they instead fight amongst themselves.

The actions and behaviors of the veterans, who are quick not only to mention their service but also to deride anything remotely Japanese, prove this point single-handedly. Even no-no boys, American by birth and by culture, are nothing but “goddamned Japs” as far as the veterans are concerned. The tension between the two groups – vets and no-no boys – is immediately apparent at Club Oriental, the local Nisei hangout, when Bull and Ichiro first meet:

“Goddammit,” [Bull] said aloud, “brand new suit. Damn near got it all cruddy.”

There was a ripple of laughter and Ichiro turned and looked at the crowd without wanting to. Someone said something about “No-no boys don’t look so good without the striped uniform” and that got a loud, boisterous laugh from the corner where a group of young Japanese who were too young to drink sat drinking. (74)

Achieving individual recognition is a Herculean task in itself for any Nisei in post-war America. The fact that the Nisei community remains at war with itself only complicates these efforts, but one cannot simply declare himself a war veteran and expect results. He must also affiliate himself with white America to be validated by it in return. For this reason alone, Bull flaunts the attractive blonde woman with him because he believes she elevates his status. Ichiro, however, recognizes Bull’s efforts for what they are, thinking to himself:

Bull’s mind was about as thick and unpliable as a brick and the meanness which had prompted him to make a spectacle of him was less to blame than the dull, beastly desire to feel the approval of the crowd, which had laughed with him for a moment instead of at him. The blonde was a compensation for his lack of acceptance also. Somehow he had managed to date her but, before the night was done, Bull would be looking stubbornly for her while someone else took her to bed. (80-81)

Nisei Japanese knew that Americans outside of the Japanese community still viewed them as foreigners, as the enemy that bombed Pearl Harbor and fought them throughout the Pacific, which was why it was paramount that the Nisei generation, on behalf of its entire ethnic community, projected a positive, patriotic image. This, along with Ichiro’s own individual pursuit for identity, rests at the heart of *No-No Boy*.

Ronald Takaki states it best in saying, “The problem, the Nisei saw... was profoundly cultural, involving the very definition of who was an American” (220-221). The Japanese-American community is at war with itself, and the war does nothing but distract its members from challenging those who are truly responsible for their persecution. The novel reflects a world in which the reality of white racism, though an everyday obstacle, is channeled through the Nisei veterans, many of whom wanted to feel the privileges of being white, even if the only privilege they acquire is hatred toward their own.

Wreckage Upon Wreckage

Ichiro Yamada fails to achieve the status of American on two fronts. First, he fails to do so in the terms set by the dominant culture, which insists that in order for a Nisei to be considered American, he must have first enlisted. His failure to achieve American-ness by these terms is only accentuated by his failure to achieve American-ness by any other term he may have ultimately set for himself. His inability to enunciate a cultural identity, which persists throughout the novel, keeps him from taking that first step toward pursuing it. He remains crippled by the overbearing perspective of the dominant culture, especially as it is enforced by his fellow Nisei. Even when confronted by the taunts and accusations of his oppressors – his fellow Nisei, acting on behalf of the dominant culture – he proves himself incapable of declaring himself anything. He cannot do so without feeling like a fraud, since in enunciating himself as either Japanese or American, he would lament the half of him that goes unacknowledged. He thinks:

it is not an easy thing to discover suddenly that being American is a terribly incomplete thing if one's face is not white and one's parents are Japanese of the country Japan which attacked America. It is like being pulled asunder by a whirling tornado and one does not think of a slide rule though that may be the thing which will save you. (54)

Ichiro's "whirling tornado" reflects Okada's inability to properly address the "slide rule" of a hyphenated cultural identity. As Lisa Lowe points out, culture stands as a repository for our collective memory and history (22). In remembering the injustices of the past, we employ culture to achieve resolution. It is through culture, Lowe insists, and *not* government that "alternative forms of subjectivity, collectivity, and public life are imagined" (22). With *No-No Boy*, Okada attempts to provide not only this alternate subjectivity to the Nisei but also overdue reconciliation. Yet despite his reimagining, he does not resolve the very socio-political inequalities he set out to overcome. This, however, is less a reflection of Okada's shortcomings as a writer than it is a reflection of the narrow scope he encountered when getting *No-No Boy* published. As Jinqi Ling illustrates, American readers in the 1950s weren't as receptive to tales of emerging hybridity as they are today. Instead, readers preferred straightforward success tales about a member of a marginalized class (whether racial, cultural or economical) overcoming the odds and assimilating into the dominant culture (Ling 361).

The most fascinating aspect about this – something Ling overlooks – is how the novel fails to fully conform to the requirements of an assimilationist novel, thereby underlying Okada's true artistic intentions. The end scene does not deliver the reconciliation and conclusion that Ichiro wants for himself and that John Okada wants for the entire Japanese-American community. The narrative here does not extend beyond "the faint and elusive insinuation of promise" (251) within Ichiro, and although its mere existence is meant to inspire hope for Ichiro's future, we find it difficult given how fragmented and conflicted an individual Ichiro remains. Ichiro is not even said to have *emerged* from the alleyway, harkening back to Bhabha, but instead is merely in the midst of a chase. Okada's word choice here indicates the lengthy process Ichiro still has ahead of him.

Culture, in proving itself as the site of socio-political reconciliation as Lowe contends, provides Okada with the proper platform to address the injustices faced by the Japanese during and after WWII. In this sense, it is appropriate to compare Okada with Paul Klee's "Angelus Novus," particularly in how it is interpreted by Walter Benjamin. Benjamin views the portrait as that of the angel of history. The angel wants desperately to right the wrongs of the past but is instead thrust forward by the winds of progress, pushed into the future while the past is left in whatever demoralized state we left it. As Benjamin writes, "[w]here we perceive a chain of events" – as the bombing of Pearl Harbor initiated the interment of Japanese citizens, who were then forced into captivity to declare allegiance to either the United States or Japan, thereby damaging the entire Japanese community – Okada can be said to see "one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage" (257). Caught between the complex tale of a splintered ethnic identity and a public demand for assimilation stories, Okada only goes halfway with *No-No Boy*: insinuating hope, albeit one that is neither realized on the page nor immediately after and unwilling (or, more accurately, unable) to deliver anything further.

Okada tries to steer Ichiro solely toward an American affiliation – just as readers and publishers would have wanted him to – but he cannot completely forsake his artistic vision and do so. Instead, Ichiro remains neither Japanese nor American and cannot foresee an identity for himself that conjoins these two halves. His inability to achieve American-ness in the world of the text – in both the standards imposed by the dominant culture, as well as any standard he could have enunciated for himself – reflects the true nature of his cultural identity: hyphenated (or, as Bhabha might insist, hybridized) to give equal weight to his Japanese and American affiliations. With the novel, Okada wanted to wage war against those responsible for the unjust persecution of the Japanese. He wanted to wage war against the Nisei responsible for turning their backs on their no-no boy brethren. Originally conceived as a reconciliatory gesture, the novel instead becomes another casualty to white America that either silences the Japanese, as it did during the war, or modifies their stories to their liking.

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Suggested Citation

Delgado, Francisco. "Neither Japanese Nor American: Identity and Citizenship in John Okada's No-No Boy". *Trespassing Journal: an online journal of trespassing art, science, and philosophy* 1 (Spring 2012). Web. ISSN: 2147-2134

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