



No-No Boy

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HCOM 322

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1. Who were the no-no boys?

The no-no boys were the ones who answered “no” on questions 27 and 28. These questions were to see whether they were loyal to the United States or not. If they answered “no” they were moved to Tule Lake and considered disloyal. The reason some of them answered no-no was because they didn’t want to leave their parents alone. The ones who answered no-no were stigmatized and suffered consequences after WWII.

*2. In **The Souls of Black Folk**, African American scholar **W. E. B. Du Bois** uses the **double consciousness theory** to describe how when the mainstream culture looks on the marginalized cultures with contemptuous eyes, people associated with those marginalized cultures can easily develop low-self esteem and sometimes hatred for their own cultures. Can you apply the theory to the analysis of the novel?*

The no-no boys were rejected by the American government and the Japanese American community. This double rejection made it difficult to unify an identity for the no-no boys. When the main character rejects a job offer, he is also rejecting a part of his identity.

3. Is the ending of the novel positive or negative? Why?

On one hand, it is a negative ending because his mother and a couple of his childhood friends died towards the end of the book. On the other hand, sadly, with the death of his mother Ichiro can be free at last to choose whatever path he wants without his mom telling him what to do. In other words, Ichiro might be able to integrate into the American culture without his mother preventing him to do so.

BONUS QUESTION

Why do we say Ichiro and Emi's was a mutually beneficial relationship?

After being released from prison, an important character, Ichiro decides to move back to Seattle. While in Seattle, Ichiro is caught between two sides. He has his parents who are very proud of being Japanese and his country, which he feels a strong connection to. Kenji, introduces him to Emi. Emi's brother and father repatriated to Japan. Her husband ends up leaving her due to shame. Ichiro and Emi become each other's emotional support. Ichiro, towards the end begins to wonder if he is truly an American.

John Okada



John Okada was born in Seattle, Washington in 1923. He was a first generation American. His parents emigrated from Japan to the United States in 1910. Okada grew up in a racially mixed neighborhood and attended the local elementary and high school. Later, he attended the University of Washington, and in the same year Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. As a consequence of the attack, many Japanese and the Okada's family were interned under President Roosevelt's executive order on February 19, 1942. Later in 1943, a loyalty questionnaire was administered by the War Department to the internment camps and they were recruiting *nisei* (2nd generation Japanese American) to fight in World War II. Okada volunteered to join the US Army Air Forces. After joining the military, he obtained a Bachelor's and Master's Degree in English. Also, Okada obtained his second Bachelor's Degree in Library Science. He got married with Dorothy Arakawa and had two children. Later, he passed away in 1971.

John Okada's works

John Okada only published work was *No-No Boy*. He completed the book in 1955, but it took two years for it to be published. The book did not receive much attention, and the Japanese-American communities rejected the book because of the bad memories of their internment during the second World War. Okada's inspiration to write this book was the Japanese-Americans that answered "no" to the loyalty questionnaire. Those Japanese-Americans were called the "No-No boys" and they were sent to prison for disloyalty. However, John Okada wrote a second novel about the issei (first-generation Japanese immigrants). His second novel was nearly finished by the time of his death, but without offers for publication. Okada's wife asked to the Japanese American Research Project at University of California, Los Angeles if they want it. They declined Mrs. Okada petition, and she decided to burn the novel. It took until the mid-1970s that Asian American writers and scholars rediscovered Okada's work and began to appreciate his literary and historical value of *No-No Boy*. John Okada is considered one of the more influential writers and *No-No Boy* is considered the most influential Japanese American work.

Central themes of the work

- ❖ **Ichiro's identity:** is integrated by his race, his age, his conflicts with his parents, the United States government and the war. It takes him a long time to find his identity, in part because his mother's domineering attitude prevents him from being his own person.
- ❖ **Overcoming Self-blame:** It is a central theme of the work because after WWII ended all the men that responded no-no were stigmatized by others, both Japanese and Anglo-saxon. Ichiro faced this stigmatization, which cause him to have problems with his identity and blame himself for it.
- ❖ **Discrimination within Japanese Americans:** When Ichiro returned home, he had to face his Japanese-American friends that responded yes to the questions and enlisted to the Army. Since he did not enlist, the ones that did discriminated him and considered him as a traitor.
- ❖ **Loyalty:** is another theme of *No-No Boy*. The boys who answered no-no did so out of loyalty to their parents or a sense of disloyalty to the U.S. The no-no boys felt betrayed by a country that was supposed to uphold their rights. The novel explores whether loyalty to identity or to a country is more important.
- ❖ **Depression:** After Ichiro's mother commits suicide, ichiro has to face difficult decisions on what to do with his life. He no longer has the struggle to get approval from his mom. There is also a lot of pressure from America and being Japanese. Ichiro deals with a lot of self conflict that causes depression.

Character analysis

- ❖ **Ichiro Yamada:** He spent two years in an internment camp for Japanese Americans and two more years in federal prison because he chose to be a “no-no boy,” refusing to serve in the armed forces and to swear allegiance to the United States. He refused to serve the United States because he was angry with the U.S government for forcing all Japanese aliens and Japanese American citizens into the internment camps. Throughout the novel, he struggles with his guilt about his decision not to fight in the war and with his feelings of conflict about his ethnic identity. In the end, he decides that he is an American and that both he and his country made mistakes.
- ❖ **Emi:** Emi is a twenty-seven year old Japanese-American, whose husband is stationed in the U.S. Army and seems as though he will not return. She is lonely and wants male companionship. She is then introduced to Ichiro by Kenji. Ichiro and her spend some time together and she encourages Ichiro to move on with his life and not think about the no-no boy he thinks he is. Ana
- ❖ **Mrs. Yamada:** Ichiro’s mom is a strong willed woman. She refuses to accept the American culture. Her love to Japan is stronger than her love as a mother to the point that she preferred that her son spent 2 years in Jail instead of enlisting to the Army.
- ❖ **Kenji Kanno:** Kenji is a friend of the main character, Ichiro Yamada. Although he is upset by the camps and discrimination shown towards Japanese Americans, he decides to join the Army. He is well-respected by his community.
- ❖ **Gary:** Ichiro’s friend who evaded the draft. He works at the Christian Reclamation Center and believes in putting his life back on track. Gives Ichiro a sense of hope and sees the goodness in people.

Styles, techniques, cinematography; auteurism, etc.

- ❖ John Okada wrote *No-No Boy* in third person. The omniscient narrator focuses on Ichiro, but readers also have access to the inner thoughts and feelings of the other characters, including Ichiro's parents. The way Okada's wrote the book let readers to explore different situations represented on the novel.
- ❖ He also uses the perspective of his mother, which she believes Japan won. Ichiro's mom is faithful to Japan and he is confused as to whether he is Japanese or American.
- ❖ In addition, the description of the setting gives the readers a vivid picture of how the town looked like before and after the war. This gives the reader an idea of how life was after and before Pearl Harbor.
- ❖ John Okada includes more than one family to not only stay true to history, but to also display how other families reacted to the internment.

What you get out of the work

Angelica

What I got from this book is that an immigrant that leaves his/her country seeking a better life in the United States always have the nostalgic feeling to return to her/his motherland. This causes problems in the family, especially if there are children from the family that are born in the USA or arrived as children, because they are the ones that live between two cultures. As a result, those Japanese-Americans, Mexican-Americans, etc, have to learn to love both countries, USA because they live here and their parents' country because their roots are over there. The problem forms when the parents want to take those children to a country that they only know because their parents tell stories about it. As a result, in many cases the children do not feel comfortable moving to a place that they do not know.

What you get out of the work

What I get from this work is that our identity is one of the most important things we have. In this case Ichiro is unsure as to whether he is Japanese or American and that is what many Mexican-Americans face with today and many others as well. In my case if you're Mexican-American and go to Mexico you're not considered Mexican but if you're here in the U.S. you're not American and that is what Ichiro is feeling with his identity as well and thanks to Emi he is slowly figuring out who he is -Ana Paola Ruiz

What you get out of the work

Sarah

What I got out of the novel was the importance of identity and knowing who you are. Ichiro struggles with his identity throughout the novel and it is only in the end of the novel that he is able to accept his past. He understands that both he and the U.S. made mistakes.

What you get out of the work

Roseanne

What I learned from the novel is the identity crisis that many people in the United States face because they do not have the same appearance as white people. Also, these people do not have a sense of belonging because they are discriminated in the place they grew up. In addition, they also do not feel connected with their parents roots and culture because they do not know their parents country and do not speak the language that their parents spoke. I think your identity is based in what you feel, think, and know about the place you are connected with without anybody interfering in your own decisions.

What you get out of the work

Patricia

As I read through John Okada's novel *No-No Boy*, i was able to relate with some of the themes. The main character had a hard time understanding where he fit in within the American society. He also had a difficult time understanding and grasping the concept of what it means to be an American. As the book progresses, he is able to grow and develop when he finds other characters in which he can rely. With the different identities, they help him understand the disfiguration in his own self. Growing up, I never had a hard time understanding where I fit in with society. I felt comfortable where I was and the culture around me. It was not until I came to CSUMB where i saw more of diverse population of students. I often feel uncomfortable, but try to learn more about the culture here. I feel like Ichiro, in the sense where I was lost, and now I am finding myself and who I am.

Bibliography

- 1) No-No Boy by John Okada. *Biography: Life of John Okada*. <https://sites.google.com/site/nonoboybyjohnokada/biography>. Accessed 14 Feb. 2018.