

Introduction to a conversation on John Okada's NO-NO BOY,  
with Frank Chin and Frank Emi. Yosh Kuromiya and--. Lawson Inada: Moderator

### THE CONVERSATIONALISTS

MODERATOR: LAWSON INADA-poet-Author of DRAWING THE LINE,

FRANK CHIN-Writer-

FRANK EMI- A Leader of the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee, the only organized camp resistance fighting for Japanese American civil against the government and their surrogate group, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL)

YOSH KUROMIYA-Heart Mountain draft resister.

### THE BOOK

NO NO BOY, by John Okada. 1957. Tokyo: Charles Tuttle.- (Reprint1976: CARP/U.of Washington: Seattle)

HAIJIME "JIM" AKUTSU-the model for "Ichiro," the protagonist in the novel NO-NO BOY. The vet Okada befriended Akutsu and spent days talking of Akutsu's internment in Minidioka, Idaho, and his becoming a No-No boy in 1943 and a draft resister in 1944.

### NO-NO

No, he said to himself as he watched her part the curtains and start into the store. There was a time when I was your son. There was a time that I no longer remember when you used to smile a mother's smile and tell me stories about gallant and fierce warriors who protected their lords with blades of shining steel and about the old woman who found a peach in the stream and took it, and when her husband split it in half, a husky little boy tumbled out to fill their hearts with boundless joy. I was that lad in the peach and you were the old woman and we were Japanese with Japanese feelings and Japanese pride and Japanese thoughts because it was all right then to be Japanese and feel and think all 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 America and raised in America and taught in America and one does not speak and swear and drink and smoke and play and fight and see and hear in America among Americans in American streets and houses without becoming American and loving it.

But I did not love enough for you were still half my mother and I was thereby still half Japanese and when the war came and they told me to fight for America, I was not strong enough to fight you and I was not strong enough to fight the bitterness which made the half me which was you bigger than the half of which was America and really the whole of me that I could not see or feel. Now that I know the truth when it is late and the half of me which was you is no longer there, I am only the half of me and the half of me that remains is American by law because the government was wise and strong enough to know why it was that I could not fight for America and did not strip me of my birthright. But it is not enough to be only half an American and know that it is an empty half. I am not your son and I am not Japanese and I am not American.

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If the No-No boy / draft resister cringes too much before the voice of the JACL, (that remains unnamed in Okada's book) it seems an accurate and moving and confusing portrayal of Hajiime "Jim" Akutsu, the model for "Ichiro" the novel's protagonist.

The No to Japan and No to America moves us with one man's choice between fighting or not fighting for America. But is the choice accurately understood by Ichiro?

Akutsu was imprisoned at Minidoka, in Idaho. The resistance was not organized at Minidoka. The resisters at, Heart Mountain that had two organizations holding meetings against the draft. One was all rhetoric but stopped at active resistance. One was organized, as the Fair Play Committee, under Kiyoshi Okamoto. Frank Emi, a leader of the Fair Play Committee and Yosh Kuromiya, a draft resister, don't feel the book portrayed the opinions or the conditions in their camp.

Kiyoshi Okamoto, of Heart Mountain had organized his Fair Play Committee of One, in 1943 against the Leave Clearance Application Form that had the so-called loyalty questions, 27 and 28 that seemed designed to trick the Nisei into volunteering for the 442<sup>nd</sup>.

Frank Emi's response to the questions was typical, "My first involvement if the resistance movement, if you will, began with the introduction of the so-called loyalty questionnaire. The questionnaire contained thirty questions. Two of the questions,

number 27 and number 28 were controversial.

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

"If you answered 'Yes,' the implication was that you were volunteering for the army.

"Number 28 read:

"28. Will you swear unqualified allegiance to the United States of America and faithfully defend the United States from any or all attack by foreign or domestic forces,' (Up to this point no problem.) 'and forswear any form of allegiance or obedience to the Japanese emperor, to any other foreign government, power or organization?'"

The wording of Question 28 was similar the JACL loyalty oath of 1942:

"... that I hereby renounce any other  
*allegiances which I may have knowingly or unknowingly* held in the  
past...."

One cannot unknowingly give their oath of allegiance, for to give an oath is to give one's word. One cannot unknowingly give their word. To unknowingly give your oath is simply ungrammatical. "Any form of allegiance or obedience" implies there is more than one form of allegiance that the swearer is aware of.

There was more than the subtleties of grammar at work in question 28. There was obvious linking of any answer with allegiance to the emperor of Japan. Many internees who had never been to Japan, saw question as a trap.

Notes Frank Emi, "If a Nisei answered 'Yes', he or she was admitting a previously sworn allegiance to the emperor. And in the case of an Issei or first generation immigrant, who were prevented from becoming citizens of this country because of racist naturalization laws at that time--if they answered 'Yes' they would become persons without a country.

"After studying the questionnaire for some time with my younger brother Art, I finally came up with a response to the questions.

"Question 27: No, under no condition because of increasing discriminatory acts

which were still are aimed at Japanese Americans, but I will do my best in helping the war effort along other fields."

"Question 28: "Under present conditions and circumstances, I am so confused that I am mentally incapable of answering sincerely.

"This my feeling at the time.

"With the help of my brother, Art, we hand printed copies of my answer on sheets of paper and posted them on mess hall doors and other public places throughout the camp, with a notation that these were suggested answers to those two questions."

Akutsu was a No-No boy, meaning he had answered questions 27 and 28 of the Leave Clearance form, No and No in 1943. The JACL demanded that all the No-No boys be cleared from the concentration camps that held "good" people and put into one camp for the "incurables" the enemies of the JACL, Tule Lake. The No-No boys weren't tried in federal court, they were not fined or imprisoned in federal penitentiaries.

Akutsu did not suffer the JACL WRA punishment of being transferred to Tule Lake. He was allowed to stay in Minidoka to take care of his hospitalized mother. In 1944 the government began drafting Nisei out of the concentration camps. It was constitutional the government said, because the concentration camps were the homes of the Japanese Americans. Kiyoshi Okamoto said that Heart Mountain wasn't his home and the draft was unconstitutional and attracted the attention of Frank Emi and others, and the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee was born.

For Frank Emi whether to accept the draft or not, was not a choice between Japan or America, it was a matter of constitutional principle. The Nisei were American citizens illegally imprisoned in concentration camps. Now the Nisei were illegally being drafted to fight for what, a home in a concentration camp?

The organized resistance of Heart Mountain sent their bulletins to James Omura at the Denver Rocky Shampo. Subscriptions to Rocky increased in virtually every camp.

And from Minidoka comes a letter from Hajime "Jim" Akutsu for Frank Emi. Akutsu's letter mixes up grievances to be redressed in a court law, with newspaper gossip, with congressional actions, with racist statements from the man in the street and gives each equal weight in his decision to ask for repatriation to Japan, without a day in court.

Jimmie H. Akutsu  
5-4-F Hunt, Idaho  
April 30, 1944

Fair Play Committee

Heart Mountain, Wyoming

Dear Sir:

As you will read by the time this letter reaches you there are six fellows from Minidoka who did not answer the call for induction on April 27, 1944. To these there are three more fellows who are out of the project and did not answer the call. Of the six fellows who did not answer the call, one happens to my brother.

Since he is more or less taking the same stand as you people are, may I give you some of his reasons why he did not report for induction. In a very near future it will be my turn to follow him so can you please look into my or his case after I will be jailed.

First-He has been treated like a Japanese alien such as concentration or detention behind barbed-wire fence without a hearing or trial. His properties confiscated. His status changed to 4C without his acknowledgement and then back to 1A. Rights as citizen taken away as well as his freedom.

Then he has been told by Gen. DeWitt "Once a Jap always a Jap." American Legion "Issei, nessei (sic) deport them all." New York Times "Loyal or disloyal depart them all, because their skin is yellow." This (is) something we cannot change.

Second-therefore, this more or less proves him that he is a Japanese and will get deported. So he cannot and will not take up arms against that country he will be deported to. And so he feels no obligation to serve in the armed force of this country.

He was requested by the President and D.S. Myers to take the preinduction physical. This he did, otherwise he cannot make any appeal for reclassification. Within the 10 days after his exam he has the right to make an appeal. This he did, but the draft board does not follow out his right, he does not have to answer the call to induction. Just before his induction he wrote another letter to reclassify him to 4C. Finally the Jerome Board No. 1 answered him, mentioning repatriation, this again proved to him that he is a Japanese.

Have you noticed just a few months back some kind of a deportation bill went through the lower house by a big majority? The government is already making provision to deport the nesseei (sic) along with the issei after the war or before the war ends. You know as well as I that most of all of the nesseei (sic) soldiers aren't

coming back. How much nessei (sic) will there be after the war is really over?

And another thing, why do these fellows (sic) going in the army have to make out a indefinite leave paper plus lots of other passes? To me it looks like plain volunteering out of the centers, because the indefinite leave paper serves as a parol (sic) paper. To be paroled out of a jail during war means volunteering into the army. This isn't yet to me, Selective Service.

About last December the Portland Oregonian and Seattle paper had an issue saying to postpone the drafting of 900 fathers in state of Washington and replace them by taking 900 men out of Minidoka. At that time there were 980 men here at Minidoka of draft age. Some were single and others had four or five children. This meant taking better than 9 out of every 10 men here at Minidoka. Since hundreds have left camp, to make this quota they are branching to other centers. Do you think this is Selective Service, I most certainly think not, they are only Shanghaing" us into a "Guinea Pig Outfit" since the first bunch that went over has already been tested and exhausted.

There is a question I'd like really to have cleared. Does a person who do not have a 1A classification be inducted into the army? Please answer me right away. Thank you I remain.

Sincerely yours,

Jimmie H. Akutsu

P.S. Are we under the jurisdiction of the International Law made at Geneva Conference? Also if we are put into a concentration camp for 6 months, does that make us a prisoners of war" Can you also answer these questions too.

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The wording, the shifts in subject, the very spacing of the typing point to a man who was obviously in a crazy state, when he wrote, but he is also typical of the angry and confused Nisei in all the camps. So Frank Emi writes an answer:

Frank Emi  
9-21-B  
Heart Mountain  
Wyo.

May 8, 1944

Mr. Jimmie H. Akutsu  
5-4-F Hunt, Idaho

Dear Mr. Akutsu,

Your registered letter of April 30 arrived in Heart Mountain last week and I

was asked to reply to you to the best our knowledge.

The fifty three boys from Heart Mountain who refused to go to their pre-induction physical are standing on the grounds that they are LOYAL AMERICAN CITIZENS and that they desire a clarification of their citizenship status and a restoration of their Constitutional rights before being inducted into the armed forces. Under no condition are they asking for expatriation or saying that they are disloyal to the United States. They have pleaded NOT GUILTY at their preliminary hearings and are expected to do so at their trial also. They are saying that they do not believe the draft law applies to them in their present suspended states in these concentration camps. That by reclassifying 4C, the Selective Service discriminated against them solely on the basis of race and ancestry. That drafting them out of these concentration camps is un-constitutional and against all principles of Democracy and civilized usage.

These boys are fighting for a principle as LOYAL AMERICAN CITIZENS. The real issue to them is not, going to the army or not going to the army, but to fight for their Constitutional rights as loyal American citizens. They know what the consequences will be should they lose the case. Two, three, or four years in jail. But they feel that whether they win or lose the court case, they, as Americans of Japanese descent will at least have stood up as real Americans to fight for justice and the application of the true meaning of Democracy right here at home. That briefly, is the feeling and the stand these boys have taken.

As to the chances of their winning their court case, there is about ten percent in their favor and about 90 percent against them and they all know it, but nevertheless they are fighting it out. That takes courage.

You mentioned that Gen. De Witt (sic) and the New York Times made some remarks about "once Jap, always a Jap" and "loyal or disloyal deport them all, because their skin is yellow". Naturally these kind of race-baiting statements would make anyone mad but don't ever let these things get you down and say that you are doing to expatriate or say that you are not going into the army because you would rather go back to Japan. That would be a sad mistake for that is just what these kind of people want you to say. Besides, if you refuse to go to the Army and instead asked for expatriation, that would automatically make you guilty and I doubt whether you would even be given a trial.

You also asked whether a person who has not received their 1A classification can be inducted into the army. From the information that I have been able to gather from our attorney, it seems that they can induct you into the army no matter what classification you are in. Of course one can bring that irregularity up at the trial.

Frank Emi begs off dealing the other questions and helping Akutsu with his case. But he does offer some good advice:

If you could possibly retain an attorney it would be helpful, but unless you could get quite a number of people to back you up financially, it would be difficult:

And he closes with:

Whatever you do in the future, I believe it would be wisest and most important to act as LOYAL AMERICAN CITIZENS and forget about expatriation and such. I believe it would benefit you more. Also, it might be of value if you would read over the Constitution of the United States, especially the Bill of Rights. That, essentially, is the basis of our stand.

I hope you the best of luck and let us hope that everything will turn out for the best.

Sincerely yours,

Frank Emi

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Interestingly it is the only book that admits that the resistance , in some camps more than one resistance was a big part of camp, was authored by a vet, a member of Intelligence to the Pacific, the kind of vet other Nisei vets envy. The book never answers the question of why a vet would choose to write about a universally despised self-pitying, obviously confused No-No.boy?

The JAACL killed the book when it was released in 1957. But reprinted in the 70's by a group of AA writers under the name CARP, NO-NO BOY sold so well, it convinced University of Washington Press that there was a market for Asian American

books. They took over the re-publication and began publishing a series of Asian American fiction and creative non fiction.

### COWARDS AND COWARDS

John Okada was a vet. He and served in Intelligence in the Pacific. He chose as his Japanese American everyman, a No-No boy, despised by vets who had volunteered from camp in 1943, and despised by the JACL promoters of the volunteer program. In 1943 there was a rumor that the JACL had offered the Nisei as "suicide battalion" and the Japanese American people as hostages. In a letter dated April 22, 1944, Mike Masaoka confirms the rumor:

"Two ideas which we seriously considered at that time illustrate to what extremes we Japanese Americans were willing to go to safeguard our homes and associations.

"One was to form a volunteer 'suicide battalion' which would go anywhere to spearhead the most dangerous missions. To assure the skeptics that the members of the 'suicide battalion' would remain loyal, if such guarantees were necessary to quell the objections of the professional agitators of the west, the families and friends of the volunteers would place themselves in the hands of the government as 'hostages'. When this idea was informally discussed with a high military official, we were informed that it was not the practice of the government to require 'hostages' or to sponsor such 'suicide battalions.'"

The people in camp that knew of the treachery, or secret patriotism of the JACL, and looked on the volunteers willing to fight for a freedom the Japanese Americans not enjoy behind barbed wire --with mixed feelings.

Ichiro answered the two "loyalty questions" of the government form suspected of recruiting volunteers for the army. Sign "Yes"-"Yes" and be called. Sign "No"-"No" and be condemned as "pro-Jap." Ichiro signed "No-No," then refused the draft and was arrested, tried, and sentenced to McNeil Island Federal Penitentiary in Washington.

The book opens on the day that Ichiro is released from prison. Ichiro's prison experience was a prison experience. Actually the resisters at McNiel Island did not have a prison or a punishing prison experience. They were not treated as criminals and were left to operate the facilities as they saw fit.

Gordon Hirabayashi and the unmarried draft resisters from Heart Mountain and resisters from other camps, lived on "the farm." Hardcore prisoners were confined to the "big house." They weren't like prisoners and they didn't live like prisoners. At Leavenworth too, the Japanese were among their own. They didn't feel like they were imprisoned criminals. For instance, at Leavenworth, Toru Ino purposely broke the rules to test his theory of diet in "solitary," because "How often do we get to prison?" The shame of wanting to hide that "Ichiro" the No-No boy feels on getting off the train in Seattle, is not credible to the resisters. Off the train, Ichiro meets a Nisei veteran:

#### FROM THE OPENING TO NO-NO BOY

The round face wasn't smiling anymore. It was thoughtful. The eyes confronted Ichiro with indecision which changed slowly to enlightenment and then to suspicion. He remembered. He knew.

The friendliness was gone as he said: "'No-no boy, huh?'"

Ichiro wanted to say yes. He wanted to return the look of despising hatred and say simply yes, but it was too much to say. The walls had closed in and were crushing all the unspoken words back down into his stomach. He shook his head once, not wanting to evade the eyes but finding it impossible to meet them. Out of big weakness little ones were branching, and the eyes he didn't have the courage to face were ever present. If it would have helped to gouge out his own eyes, he would have done so long ago. The hate-churned eyes with the stamp of unrelenting condemnation were his cross and he had driven the nails with his own hands.

"Rotten bastard. Shit on you." Eto coughed up a mouthful of sputum and rolled his words around it: "Rotten, no good bastard."

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If a vet and a No-No boy recognized the other for what he was, they would keep their feelings about the other being a coward, a dupe who abandoned his people to themselves and avoided contact. But I seem to recall that Akutsu , when the recorder was off, did admit to being spit on.

The resisters who've read NO-NO BOY hate it, but for different reasons than the JACL. The book is disturbing and haunting. Beyond the cringing of the No-No boy draft resister, that enrages the resisters, and the book's unrelenting bitterness at the government treatment of the Japanese Americans that catches in the throat of the JACL there is the presence of the author, the vet, who reveals himself briefly in the preface:

#### From THE PREFACE

Two years later a good Japanese-American who had volunteered for the army sat smoking in the belly of a B-24 on his way back to Guam from a reconnaissance flight to Japan. His job was to listen through his earphones, which were attached to a high frequency set, and jot down air-ground messages spoken by Japanese-Japanese in Japanese planes and in Japanese radio shacks.

The lieutenant who operated the radar-detection equipment was a blond giant from Nebraska said: "Where you from?"

The Japanese-American who was an American soldier answered"

"No place in particular."

"You got folks?"

"Yeah, I got folks."

"Where at?"

"Wyoming, out in the desert."

"Farmers, huh?"

"Not quite."

"What's that mean?"

"Well, it's this way..." And then the Japanese-American whose folks were still Japanese-Japanese, or else they would not be in a camp with barbed wire and watchtowers with soldiers holding rifles, told the blond giant from Nebraska about the removal of the Japanese from the Coast, which was called the evacuation, and about the concentration camps, which were called relocation centers.

The lieutenant listened and he didn't believe it. He said: "That's funny. Now, tell me again."

The Japanese-American soldier of the American army told it again and didn't change a word.

The lieutenant believed him this time. "Hell's bells," he exclaimed, "if they'd done that to me, I wouldn't be sitting in the belly of a broken down B-24 going back to Guam from a reconnaissance mission to Japan."

"I got reasons," said the Japanese-American soldier soberly.

"They could kiss my ass," said the lieutenant from Nebraska.

"I got reasons," said the Japanese-American soldier soberly, and he was thinking about a lot of things but mostly about his friend who didn't volunteer for the army because his father had been picked up in the second screening and was in a different camp from the one he and his mother and two sisters were in. Later on, the army tried to draft his friend out of the relocation camp into the army and the friend had stood before the judge and said let my father out of that other camp and come back to my mother who is an old woman but misses him enough to want to sleep with him and I'll try on the uniform. The judge said he couldn't do that and the friend said he wouldn't be drafted and they sent him to the federal prison where he now was.

"What the hell are we fighting for?" said the lieutenant from Nebraska.

"I got reasons," said the Japanese-American soldier soberly and thought some more about his friend who was in another kind of uniform

because they wouldn't let his father go to the same camp with his mother and sisters.

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Might the "Japanese-American soldier" be exploring his shame for having taken advantage of a chance to get out of the boredom of camp, for the army? Might he have come to feel he had become too wrapped up in himself and betrayed his family to a life in a camp, like Ichiro the NO-NO BOY? The brief portrait of a soldier, in the Preface by a volunteer soldier, is the only portrait not approved by the JACL or by a member of the JACL. Both, the boys that went into the service, and the boys that resisted the draft and went to jail heard stories of families suffering harassment by unsympathetic people in camp. We don't know. Okada is in his book and he isn't. And that's the reason the book and camp with all it's ugliness and beauty still lives...or does it?

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It's been 30 years since NO-NO BOY was re-introduced to the world. It's assumed that it's a classic. But even classics have the power of stimulating new insights with new times. The JACL drove NO-NO BOY off the shelves when it first came out. No one has come forward with the JACL arguments against NO-NO BOY, The resisters have emerged since NO-NO BOY's re-publication, some would say the resisters have been re-discovered because of NO-NO BOY's re-publication. No one in the 30 years since it's rediscovery has considered the body of knowledgeable Japanese American opinion about the novel by John Okada.

Lawson Inada-Moderator

Frank Chin

Frank Emi-A leader of the Heart Mountain Fair Play Committee,

Yosh Kuromiya-resister

Albert Saijo-442<sup>nd</sup>, poet