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Art, Literature, and the Japanese American Internment

On John Okada's *No-No Boy*



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EDITION

Introduction: Japanese American Internment and the Holocaust

When a few months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 in early 1942, he cleared the way for the forced removal and internment of over 110,000 ethnic Japanese living on the West Coast. Most of them remained behind barbed wire for nearly three years, imprisoned in the tar-paper covered barracks of ten huge camps especially set up for the purpose. Located in deserted areas of Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Idaho, Utah and Wyoming, internment quickly proved to be an excruciating experience for the wrongfully displaced, including many artists.

For Japanese American artists [...] the incarceration affected their capacity to make and show art; their trajectories as artists were cut short, sidetracked, or derailed. We need to recognize the impact of incarceration and its aftermath, but even more, we need to admire the determination, and perhaps envy the passion, with which these artists have carried on.¹

Scholarship on cultural activities within the camps is still comparatively scarce. Only the past two decades have witnessed a growing interest in the arts produced in the camps – as well as in literature and art inspired or informed by the camp experience. As recently as 2004, Russell Leong, editor-in-chief of UCLA's *Amerasia Journal* could still wonder why especially the non-literary arts received such scant attention in Asian American scholarship.

Is it because Asian American Studies has a distaste for or disavows the power of tactile artistic endeavor? Or does it have to do with technical publishing matters, such as the ability and cost of printing color images, for example, musical scores, librettos, or theatrical scripts? Or is it an editorial bias toward literature, be it prose or poetry? The answer is: all of the above.²

The impetus behind this study was to gain further insight into both the art and literature from and about the camps by researching, consulting and evaluating as much source material as possible. Besides my retrieval at UCLA's Japanese American Studies Center of early articles, books, and official government records,

1 Higa, Karin M. *Living in Color: The Art of Hideo Date*, Los Angeles: Japanese American National Museum, 2001, 24.

2 Leong, Russell (ed.). *A Tribute to Miné Okubo / Amerasia Journal* 30, 2 (2004), vii.

unpublished original documents include numerous quotations from letters and postcards, archived at the Hirasaki National Resource Center, Japanese American National Museum (JANM), Los Angeles. Written by prisoners during internment, they were accessed to highlight the role of the arts within the camps. Heretofore unpublished material and valuable records relating to the Japanese American writer John Okada and his family's internment – such as the War Relocation Authority Form 26 Evacuation Summary Data or the Final Accountability Roster (FAR) for Minidoka – were referenced here for the first time. All issues of Minidoka's camp newspaper, the *Minidoka Irrigator*, were evaluated in regard to the Okada family imprisonment, overall camp set-up as well as general prison conditions. Thus, a comprehensive biographical study of Okada is contained within these pages, providing new insights pertaining to the life and work of the person considered to be the first Japanese American novelist. I interviewed many members of John Okada's family, including his widow, children and siblings over a period of many years. In addition, at Columbia University's Teachers College, Okada's unpublished records were retrieved and researched.

Based on many new findings, two things become obvious that until today were unrecognized in scholarship on the author. First, Okada was well aware of and certainly guided by Western literary traditions. Second, the original edition of his novel *No-No Boy*, published in May 1957, was not neglected but instead received numerous enthusiastic reviews prior to its "discovery" and republication in 1976.

Within this context, however, it should also be noted that this study does not negate the great contributions of early Japanese American scholarship. Two decades before reparations and official apologies, it was pre-eminent Asian American writers and scholars like Frank Chin, Lawson Fusao Inada, Paul Chan and Shawn Wong who started to draw attention to the internment camp experience within and outside their respective communities. From the late 1960's onwards, the gradual establishment of departments for Asian American studies within the US was also an uphill political battle, where early novels like Okada's had to be positioned by hailing its achievements as a mouthpiece for a neglected minority, a *deus ex machina* incomparable to and conceived independently of any literature that had come before.

Long-term exchanges with Frank Chin, as well as several meetings and email exchanges with Russell Leong, Professor Jinqi Ling and the documentary filmmaker Frank Abe helped to guide this publication in the right direction. Through Chin, many LA-based dialogues with draft-resisting freedom fighters Frank Emi (some of his unpublished papers and lectures are quoted here for the first time) and Yosh Kuromiya, as well as with the poet and former prisoner Paul Tsuneishi,

contributed greatly to this study. Where the retrieval of direct oral history by the author was no longer possible, documents from the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution – such as an unpublished interview with Frank Okada – proved to be helpful sources.

By applying a methodology as outlined above, I meant to steer clear of theory-oriented discourse which is predominant in today's academic papers. The research to obtain and the study of primary sources often proves more beneficial than scholarship based solely on secondary literature and theory which many times furthers misunderstandings and misconceptions. Only by avoiding the entrapment of the ivory tower's self-referential superstructures, by keeping texts simple without taking any of the complexity away, may students and the general reader be tempted into falling in love with academic texts. To this author, the reconciliation of arts, scholarship and the people should be the foundation of all intellectual endeavors within the humanities.

The historian Joseph J. Ellis has argued elsewhere that “hindsight history, sometimes called counterfactual history, is usually no history at all, but most often a condescending game of one-upmanship in which the living play political tricks on the dead.”³ While this publication does not intend to be a revisionist account of the way Japanese American internment was viewed at the time within the US, early studies and articles of the 1940's and 50's documenting the colossal wrongfulness of the internment while speaking out against this injustice are neglected in most of the scholarship on the subject today. I was relieved to find that there were many throughout the decades, who saw and acted publicly against the imprisonment of ordinary citizens. Which in turn does not negate the fact that in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor, public outcries of xenophobia, fear and hatred pertaining to ethnic Japanese living on the US West Coast far outnumbered those speaking out in their favor (see figure 1).

In that same vein, the most prominent organ and mouthpiece of Japanese Americans in the United States, the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) has often been chastised for its early collaborationist support of the “military necessity” of removing those it represented. Resentment and suspicion towards JACL's leaders was widespread among the imprisoned ethnic Japanese, especially at internment camps like Tule Lake. This was in part because the organization's publicly voiced pro-American ideology seemed to comply all too readily with the Army's and the War Relocation Authority's evacuation efforts to purportedly

3 As quoted in: Fulton, Robert A. “Letter to the Editor,” in: *The New York Times Book Review* (May 9, 2010), 6.

insure the safety of the United States.⁴ At the same time, however, the JACL also issued lesser-known statements seldom quoted, remarking that

if, on the other hand, [...] evacuation is primarily a measure whose surface urgency cloaks the desires of political or other pressure groups who want us to leave merely for motives of self-interest, we feel we have every right to protest and to demand equitable judgment on our merits as American citizens.⁵

Similarly, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) has been criticized for its silent compliance with regard to the forced removal of Japanese Americans. Yet when martial law was declared at the Tule Lake internment camp between November 4, 1943 and January 15, 1944, it was the ACLU who fought for the release of almost two dozen “US citizens of Japanese ancestry who had been imprisoned [...] for more than eight months without charges or hearings, and without the privilege of receiving visits from their parents, wives, children and friends.”⁶ All the while, Executive Order 9066 was seen to be “unprecedented and founded on no specific evidence of need,” with the danger of “readily result[ing] in illegal action.”⁷ American citizens of Japanese ancestry, after all, had “the same rights and the same duties that other citizens have.”⁸

An exhaustive and early two-volume study of the evacuation and its aftermath begun in 1942 by the University of California, Berkeley, spoke of the “repressive measures undertaken by government agencies” as early as 1946.⁹ It also chastised the “unprecedented and ambiguous status of citizens [...] in the land of their own birth.”¹⁰ As for the Nisei, second-generation Japanese-Americans and US citizens by right of birth,

their parents had lost their hard-won foothold in the economic structure of America, whereas they, themselves, had been deprived of rights which indoctrination in American

4 Thomas, Dorothy Swaine, and Richard S. Nishimoto. *The Spoilage: Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1946, 73 (fn 26), 75.

5 Eaton, Allen H. *Beauty Behind Barbed Wire: The Arts of the Japanese in Our War Relocation Camps*, New York: Harper, 1952, 180-181.

6 Thomas, Dorothy Swaine, and Richard S. Nishimoto. *The Spoilage*, 300.

7 Grodzins, Morton. *Americans Betrayed: Politics and the Japanese Evacuation*, Chicago: Chicago UP, 1949, 190-91.

8 Grodzins, 183.

9 Thomas, Dorothy Swaine, and Richard S. Nishimoto. *The Spoilage*, xii; see also Thomas, Dorothy Swaine. *The Salvage: Japanese American Evacuation and Resettlement*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952.

10 Thomas, 361.

schools had led them to believe inviolable. They had been stigmatized as disloyal on grounds often far removed from any criterion of political allegiance. They had been at the mercy of administrative agencies working at cross-purposes [...]. They had become terrified by reports of continuing hostility of the American public.¹¹

In October 1944, when most Japanese Americans were still behind barbed wire, the young author, journalist, lawyer and public intellectual Carey McWilliams already vigorously condemned the “stupendous human drama”¹² of internment in the first book-length study to appear on the subject. McWilliams’ book opens with John Stuart Mill’s often quoted epigram from his 1848 *Principles of Political Economy*: “Of all the vulgar modes of escaping from the consideration of the social and moral influences on the human mind, the most vulgar is that of attributing the diversities of conduct and character to inherent natural differences.” Stating that the “relocation program [...] directly and indirectly involves the question of racial minorities in the United States,” McWilliams noted an increase – not a decrease – in “agitation against persons of Japanese ancestry on the West Coast” after the internment.¹³ Issues not resolved since the Civil War allowed for “provincial prejudices of a particular region” (i.e. the West Coast) to “dictate important aspects of our Far Eastern policy [...]. Since the federal government had capitulated to the South on the Negro question, it found itself powerless to cope with race bigotry on the Pacific Coast.”¹⁴ At the time, McWilliams was chief of the division of immigration and housing at the California Department of Industrial Relations. From 1942 onward, with articles published in the *New Republic* and elsewhere, he made it clear that “race prejudice is capable of blinding us,” with “jingoists and racists” in the US playing into the hands of those Japanese exploiting the situation on the West Coast for their own propaganda purposes. McWilliams ends his book by quoting from a letter by a captain of the Army Air Force published in the April 10, 1944 issue of *Time* magazine:

To the last man our group is not in accord with what some people in the States are trying to do with some American citizens, namely the Jap citizens [...]. Don’t touch one of them because he has Japanese blood. We are fighting for all American citizens, and when we die for them, we don’t stop to ask what kind of blood they have. We are fighting for the sacred rights of man; we don’t want them toyed with behind our backs.¹⁵

11 Ibid.

12 McWilliams, Carey. *Prejudice. Japanese Americans: Symbol of Racial Intolerance*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1944, 191.

13 McWilliams, 13, 3.

14 McWilliams, 12.

15 McWilliams, 328.

Similarly, books that appeared just a few years later, such as Morton Grodzin's authoritative study of 1949, *Americans Betrayed: Politics and the Japanese Evacuation*, say it all in their title. There, internment is denounced as "without precedent in the past and with disturbing implications for the future," where "regional considerations, emotional half-truths, and racial prejudice colored the public discussion."¹⁶The "weakness of government" and "lack of information" lead to "military control" where "the protection of civil liberties becomes virtually impossible."¹⁷

Apart from an examination of the historical record and early, heretofore rarely acknowledged studies, the subject matter of this publication must also take into account an evaluation of the terminology used throughout: The specific term "Japanese American" is referred to, as is the broader term, "Asian American." Their use is by no means interchangeable. The latter term is only applied when the particularities of the former need to be contextualized within a more general framework of ideas. As an example, the increasing visibility and study of Okada's *No-No Boy* is unthinkable without the frame of reference created by the rise of Asian American studies as a whole, in the same way that Japanese Americans requesting an official apology and reparations from the federal government cannot be fully understood without reference to both the Civil Rights and the Asian American movements of the late 1960's. Another debate about terminology involves the proper name for the Japanese American camps erected along the West Coast during World War II. Here, the decades-old question is whether to refer to them as internment camps or concentration camps. For this author and his particular ethnicity, this is a sensitive issue that the remainder of this introduction as well as the beginning of the first chapter attempts to both explore and solve when determining how scholarship on the arts and the Holocaust can be applied or be of use while examining artistic forms of expression revolving around the Japanese American internment camp experience.

This publication in part builds upon research conducted for my M.A. thesis in American Studies at Hamburg University, "John Okada's *No-No Boy*: (National) Identity, Historical Context, and Western Tradition," 2001. I was first made aware of the subject matter during a graduate class on Emergent Contemporary American Literatures at New York University in 1996, while on a DAAD scholarship. Furthermore, the teaching of original texts like Okada's is examined within this study, as the first introduction to the plight of the Japanese Americans during and after World War II more often than not takes place in classrooms of high

16 Grodzins, vii, 372.

17 Grodzins, 370-71.

schools, colleges and universities worldwide. Parts of the chapter on the “Publication History, Reception and Teaching of Okada’s *No-No Boy*” were previously published in the Spring 2008 issue of UCLA’s *Amerasia Journal*, in a contribution titled “Of Eastern Thoughts and Western Minds: Teaching Asian American Literature to German Eurocentrics”.

In the summer of 1996 in a Greenwich Village café, while meeting a friend, the Jamaican poet Dwight Maxwell, two orthodox Jews picked up on my German accent.¹⁸ They quietly moved away from the neighboring table. My friend alerted me to their departure, assuring me I had just encountered racism. But that was not the case. The two men had left because they could not stand to listen to the language spoken by those who had executed their ancestors. I walked over, deeply moved and eager to let them know that – today at least – hundreds and thousands of Germans take to the streets in protest almost every time an act of xenophobic violence occurs in my country. So large looms the Holocaust that many of us cannot read Nietzsche, listen to Wagner or even read German poets from centuries ago without thinking of how the Nazis hijacked their works to use it toward their own ends. It hurts to remember that Hitler infiltrated my country’s history to such an extent that it is nearly impossible to delve into any age of Germany’s culture without bearing in mind the crimes he initiated, crimes actively or passively supported by our not-too-distant relatives.

The social psychologist Harald Welzer has pointed out that Germany’s second post-war generation is keen to maintain the moral integrity of our grandparents, while acknowledging Germany’s overall complicity with Hitler and his thugs.¹⁹ But certainly not all grandfathers and grandmothers could have been part of a virtually nonexistent resistance. As for me, I still love my late grandmother, though she watched in silence when Jewish children were taken away from the kindergarten where she was teaching. I love her dearly – even when she attempted to justify the deplorable war Germany had started, bitter from losing her husband somewhere in Ukraine. I disagreed when I addressed the Third Reich with her, trying to grasp the insanity of the war by the sheer distance of almost three thousand miles separating my grandfather’s unmarked grave at the Crimean Sea from his native village near Luxemburg.

18 The following pages are part of an unpublished essay, “Young Germans and the Holocaust,” first drafted in 1996 and submitted to *The New York Times* Op-Ed pages on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the beginning of WWII in 1999.

19 Welzer, Harald, Sabine Moeller and Karoline Tschuggnail. “*Mein Opa war kein Nazi*”: *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis*, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2002.

But who am I to judge my grandmother? It is preposterous to speculate whether I would have mustered the courage to speak out against the Nazis had I lived back then. Coming of age in the 1980's in Western Germany, most of my generation has never experienced anything remotely close to Hitler's democratically elected dictatorship.

One day in 1997, the years, months and days that had passed between the end of World War II and my birthday in 1971, equaled my age precisely. This realization brought Hitler's atrocities disturbingly close again. Like a stone thrown into a pond, I saw my life as just the second ripple away from the epicenter of its impact. Only my parents' generation separates me from those responsible for the darkest crimes in the 20th century. A personal realization, it seemed, yet by talking to my friends I realized that some of them had gone through the very same experience, grasping the Holocaust's closeness in time by reflecting on their own age and the date of Nazi Germany's surrender.

Ensuing discussions brought forth very different approaches among those of my generation to the crimes of our forefathers. Many of us seemed eager to put everything behind. After all, we were not actively involved in the Holocaust. Billions of dollars in reparations had been paid. We have learned so much about our country's wrongs in school and on television, through books and our parents, that we simply can't bear to be reminded of it again and again. Others awkwardly tried to laugh the whole thing off, a final proof that the matter has been dealt with sufficiently and is now rather an abstraction of a century past. Then there were those who detested Hitler so fervently as to be convinced they would have killed the Nazi leader had they only lived in his time. Yet another reaction in dealing with the Holocaust is to regard what happened between 1933 and 1945 as a huge and eternal burden. Overcome by an all-encompassing sense of guilt, some of us begged for that comforting pat on the back.

On June 2, 1967, student Benno Ohnesorg was shot and killed by the police in West Berlin in protests revolving around the visit of the Persian Shah to Germany. It was on this occasion that Gudrun Ensslin, future member of the Red Army Faction, accused the government of being fascist, called for the armament of the people and dismissed the authorities as follows: "This is the generation of Auschwitz. You can't reason with them."²⁰ Our generation, however, cannot as easily place blame, as we are already twice removed from the generation of those involved. The generation before us at least thought they could reproach their parents for what had happened. We do not have that luxury, and are better off

20 <<http://www.boell.de/stiftung/struktur/struktur-2408.html>> (April 22, 2010).

in refraining from self-righteous finger-pointing. In any case, in light of the terrorist acts that swept through Germany in the 1970's, one is often left to wonder whether those who deemed themselves farthest removed from Nazism were not indeed those closest to their mindset in an otherwise budding democracy. How else to explain the RAF killings of innocents, its dictatorial structures and bull-headed idealism that would not allow for dissent?

Günther Grass – himself a member of the Waffen SS in his youth, something he publicly admitted to only in 2006 – has often remarked how communist extremists and Nazi fascists have much more in common than they would ever allow. At the same time, we are no longer in shock that the man who dined with his devoted wife and beloved children is the same man who had killed prisoners in Auschwitz only a few hours prior. We have an acute sense of the aggression that lies dormant in the spoiled *citoyens* of a democracy, by realizing just how mad we ourselves can get for no reason at all – as when somebody is walking slowly in front of us on a subway platform while we are eager to move ahead. And it is precisely this knowledge which should humble us in light of world affairs, as we don't know what we would be capable of if our house were burnt down or our loved ones killed in front of our own eyes – which is why we have the obligation to make sure that this will never happen. Which is why we must ensure peace, freedom of speech and the dignified treatment of all humans – the pillars of any democratic society. It is painful to see that neo-Nazis, after using rather ludicrous slogans such as “I am proud to be a German,” have often ceded waving the black-white-red flag of the German Reich, and are now abusing the official black-red-gold flag of our Federal Republic instead.

Today, with the last Holocaust survivors dying, we share the responsibility to keep the memory alive without craving a comforting pat on the back for the turmoil we are thrown into when talking about Germany's past. Our ancestors fought a war that cleared the way for the most horrible crime against humanity. They were not herded off to die in a concentration camp without leaving a trace. And let there be no mistake: No money in the world can ever right these wrongs or should make us feel as if we did not have to look back into our past in order to also look ahead. It is solely our own actions, today, for which we can be held accountable. At the turn of the century, Ignaz Bubis, the president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, spoke out with many against every form of racism and hostility toward foreigners, just as his successors Paul Spiegel, Charlotte Knobloch and Dieter Graumann did since. Although neo-Nazi violence will not succeed in even slightly shaking the democratic pillars of a reunited Germany already decades old, with xenophobic attacks on the rise, there remains plenty to be done to appropriately counter this aggression on every level of our society.

Walking around Berlin nowadays, it's painful to notice police officers with machine guns positioned in front of the city's synagogues and kosher delis. This closely scrutinized capital cannot afford a single smashed window. The police officers' presence speaks volumes of a past meant to stay with us. There is a cruel saying in Germany, stating that the Germans will never forgive the Jews for the Holocaust. Auschwitz is at the heart of Germany's postwar identity, an open wound, as incomprehensible and important as it is for Jews, with the most crucial difference being that our ancestors were the perpetrators while Jews were the victims. The Holocaust can and must never be forgiven. Dead victims cannot forgive, just as dead executioners cannot ask for forgiveness. My generation cannot be guilty of something we have not done. But precisely because we are *not* directly responsible, we have the responsibility to not detach ourselves from our country's horrible past, not to tire of discussing the Holocaust and learning about it – more through the great abundance of primary sources than via mediated, often fictional versions of this period churned out by Hollywood or the publishing industry.

We have to make sure this genocide will not be watered down by inappropriate and inflationary use of Nazi symbols in different contexts – such as likening a politician to Adolf Hitler (as has happened during the Tea Party Movement's smear-campaign against President Barack Obama's health-care reform) simply because one strongly objects to some of her or his policies, or making use of the swastika to protest against doctors performing abortions. To be sure, the swastika itself is an ancient symbol misused by the Nazis. When it is evoked today within the context of our culture, however, it is far removed from its Indian, Greek, Celtic, Chinese or Native American roots as an inspirational sign. Here, I have to agree with *The New York Times* art director Steven Heller's assessment that it should not be used "as anything other than an icon of evil" explicitly referring to the Third Reich.²¹

So strong is the ill-conceived appropriation of and fascination with Hitler's Germany today that one can only hope that WWII theme-parks or concentration camp-style runway fashion will not be dreamt up in years to come. While preserving the past, we also have to learn to embrace a present in which being German includes being Jewish, Muslim or Hindu. Behind each and every single number of the 6,000,000 Jews killed, behind any nationality, ethnicity, religious or political belief, there is a unique individual, an irreplaceable human being. From the writings of Frederick Douglass to those of Primo Levi, this is a universal lesson

21 Heller, Steven. *The Swastika: Symbol Beyond Redemption?*, New York: Allworth Press, 2000.

to always learn anew and not to be forgotten. The only way for my generation to do justice to those lives lost is to accept a national responsibility without closure and try to act as caretakers of the Holocaust. Like the grandchildren of the victims, the grandchildren of the perpetrators have an obligation to this legacy.

It is out of this responsibility as a German that I have decided not to refer to the Japanese American internment camps as concentration camps, though throughout the literature on the subject, the term is commonly used.²² In his preface to *No-No Boy*, Okada uses the words himself, describing a situation not unlike his own as a sergeant, with an American and a Japanese American WWII soldier exchanging thoughts on a B-24 airplane while returning from a reconnaissance flight back to an army base on Guam:

And then the Japanese-American whose folks were still Japanese-Japanese, or else they would not be in 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.²³

Of course, the euphemistic use of language consciously implemented and enforced by the authorities to circumvent the application of words better fitted to describe the facts at hand is already addressed here. Moreover, from the very beginning, the “earliest materials called the camps ‘colonies’ and Japanese Americans ‘colonists’ [...] The government called Japanese Americans ‘pioneers’ and the camps their ‘frontier.’”²⁴ In this regard it has been argued that “in a sense, the government (including the executive, legislative, and judicial branches) circumvented the obvious unconstitutionality of detaining American citizens without evidence, charge or trial through euphemisms.”²⁵

The strategy behind the employment of “deceptive terminology for propaganda purposes”²⁶ applied by the US government may indeed be compared to

22 Higa, Karin M. *The View from Within: Japanese American Art From the Internment Camps, 1942-1945*, [exh. cat.] Los Angeles: University of California (Frederick S. Wight Art Gallery), 1992, 15; see also <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japanese_Americaninternment> (June 27, 2010) for a debate on terminology.

23 Okada, *No-No Boy* (1957), Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998, x-xi.

24 Hong Sohn, Stephen. “These Desert Places: Tourism, The American West, and the Afterlife of Regionalism in Julie Okatsu’s ‘When the Emperor was Divine,’” in: *Modern Fiction Studies* 55, 1 (Spring 2009), 163-188, 179.

25 Okamura, Raymond Y. “The American Concentration Camps: A Cover-up through Euphemistic Terminology,” in: *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 10, 3 (Fall 1982), 95-108, 95.

26 Okamura, 96.

the one employed by Nazi Germany to hide through language the most atrocious crime of all of humankind. It should not go unmentioned either that the Japanese were referred to as “the Jews of the Orient,” as in these remarks made in 1944 – a time, of course, at which the scope of the genocide taking place in German-occupied territories was not yet known:

Because anti-Semitism has become so closely identified with Nazism in the eyes of the American people, the Jew could scarcely be made the ‘ideal’ scapegoat of a fascist movement in America. But the resident Japanese could be made the ideal ‘internal enemy,’ as, indeed, they already are in the West Coast. Substitute the ‘bucktoothed, slant-eyed, bow-legged Jap’ for the ‘hook-nosed, grimy Jew,’ and you have created a symbol against which much of the accumulated hatreds (racial and otherwise), and all of the pent-up fury, of some of our population might easily be directed. Speaking in San Francisco recently, Sinclair Lewis shrewdly observed: ‘If fascism ever comes to California, its campaigns of racial hatred will be directed not at the Jews but at the Orientals.’²⁷

To be sure, lest there be any reproach in this regard from those seeing parallels, the government did everything to pitch the “comfortable” camps on US soil against those under Nazi rule, with its “conscience-appeasing interpretation of Manzanar as the absolute antithesis of a ‘Nazi-style concentration camp’ that, in the end, ‘couldn’t have been so bad.’”²⁸

Nevertheless, accounts of the Japanese American relocation process read eerily like those of Nazi concentration camps: “The terminology of the euphemistic internment camp and its counterpart, concentration camp, was interchangeable at the time.”²⁹ Yet while expressions of smoke-and-mirror language can be compared with each other, the ends for which it was exploited certainly must not. Concentration camps in today’s use of the word have become synonymous with Nazi extermination or “death” camps and the term should only be used in this regard.³⁰

27 McWilliams, 324.

28 See Colborn-Roxworthy, Emily. “Manzanar, the eyes of the world are on you’: Performance and Archival Ambivalence at a Japanese American Internment Camp,” in: *Theatre Journal* 59 (2007), 189-214, 193 (quoting a *San Francisco News* article of April 21, 1942).

29 Gracia, Amy A. “Streets of Despair and Blocks of Hope: The Form and Function of Directional Props in John Okada’s *No-No Boy*,” 2008 [Shea Scholar Program thesis, Bridgewater State College; unpublished], 29; quoting Tom Ikeda from Densho, *The Japanese American Legacy Project*, Stanford University <<http://www.densho.org/>>

30 A closer examination of Japanese American internment camps also begs for a differentiation of terminology that will be specifically addressed later on in this study.

Of course, the argument for labeling Japanese American internment camps as concentration camps is still ongoing. The way, for example, in which issues of sanitation and health were addressed betrays to some extent that camps were not planned solely for relocation:

This underscores the government's response to such a major public health problem. First, there was a significant need for medical facilities, and second, the army and WCCA [Wartime Civil Control Association] were averse to providing these essential services. Instead, it seems clear that their intent all along was to create a concentration camp, not a 'colony' or a 'relocation center'.³¹

It does not come as a surprise either that beyond language, more parallels are addressed in secondary literature, such as the very justification for internment, which the Constitution did not validate:

The judicial basis for interment was not common law but *Schutzhaft* (literally protective custody), a juridical institution of Prussian origin that the Nazi jurors sometimes classified as a preventive police measure [...]. As Hannah Arendt assessed it a half-century ago, the decline of nation-state sovereignty was accompliced by the decline of the rights of man.³²

"Detention" and "imprisonment" simply became known as "evacuation" and "relocation," as if those interred were in need of special protection. The words "colonist," "evacuee" and "resident" all sounded better than "prisoner" and were implemented as such by official documents, the purpose of which is clear.³³

The euphemistic language accomplished a number of important objectives for the government: (1) it sidetracked legal and constitutional challenges; (2) it allowed the government to maintain a decent public image; (3) it helped lead the victims into willing cooperation; (4) it permitted the white civilian employees to work without self-reproach; and (5) it kept the historical record in the government's favor.³⁴

Ludwig Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations* (1953) was aware that the usage of a word within the "Sprachspiel" or language game, devoid of consensus

31 Jensen, Gwenn M. "System Failure: Health-Care Deficiencies in the World War II Japanese American Detention Centers," in: *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 73, 4 (1999), 602-628, 620.

32 Sakai, Naoki. "Two Negations: Fear of Being Excluded and the Logic of Self-Esteem," in: Calichman, Richard F. (ed.), *Contemporary Japanese Thought*, New York: Columbia UP, 2005, 229-257, 229.

33 See a memorandum of War Relocation Authority (WRA) director Dillon S. Myer (October 2, 1942), as quoted by Okamura, 99-100.

34 Okamura, 101.

in what constitutes reality, was the only determining factor in assessing its meaning. Keeping this in mind as well, it is imperative to prevent the further spread of vocabulary used by the oppressors within the context of Japanese American internment during WWII. At the same time, it is equally important not to overburden or dilute the term “concentration camp,”³⁵ because it is already highly charged with its inextricable association exclusive to Nazi Germany and the Holocaust and thus incomparable in its magnitude and genocidal implications to the mistreatment of Japanese Americans on US soil. For the latter, “internment camp” is the appropriate term for the gruesome, enforced imprisonment of over 110,000 people of Japanese ancestry. In the same vein, comments positioning the Japanese camps as “the poor man’s Holocaust”³⁶ are not helpful in keeping the experiences apart while carefully examining the parallels. In addition, West Germany’s *Historikerstreit* of the late 1980’s about the comparability of Nazi crimes and the Holocaust with other atrocities has long ago lead to a deeper comprehension that the requirement for an understanding of the particular singularity of such unique historic events can only be determined by contrasting them with others. A conflation of Japanese American internment with the Nazi genocide even in regard to the use of its terminology would therefore be inappropriate in that it would deflate attempts at establishing their respective singularity.

After finding themselves enemies on opposite sides during WWI, Germany and Japan were close allies during WWII. The Nazi propaganda machine was eager to portray the Asian ally in a heroic and sympathetic way. Popular books like *Das Geheimnis Japanischer Kraft* (Engl.: *The Secret of Japan’s Strength*), by

35 At the time Franklin D. Roosevelt and Dwight D. Eisenhower did refer to the camps as “concentration camps.” During the 1998 exhibition *American Concentration Camps - Memories of the Japanese-American Experience*, organized by the Japanese American National Museum in LA and later shown on Ellis Island, the latter term was the cause of much debate. David A. Harris, then the director of the New York Jewish Committee spoke out against such broad usage, arguing that it led to a “watering down of the term concentration camp” (cf. “Lagerdenken,” in *Der Spiegel* 12 (March 16, 1998), 259. [author’s translation]).

36 Yamagiwa Alfaro, Rosanna. “Ethnic Expectations: The Politics of Staging the Internment Camps,” in: Harth, Erica. *Last Witnesses: Reflections on the Wartime Internment of Japanese Americans*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 205-214, 205. Often-times, the “comparisons as to the level of suffering that was involved silenced” many Japanese-Americans, “because, as Emiko Omori states in her documentary *Rabbit in the Moon* (1999), ‘It was not bad enough.’” See Yamada, Mitsuye, “Legacy of Silence (I),” in Harth, Erica, *Last Witnesses*, 35-46, 40.

Albrecht Fürst von Urach, were published in many editions by the Nazi party starting in the early 1940's. The book glorified Japan's rapid industrialization and the samurai warrior tradition, the study of which was deemed beneficial not only to the SS or soldiers of the German Wehrmacht.

Already in *Mein Kampf* (1925), Adolf Hitler already acknowledged the Japanese *volk* as the only Asian people of cultural significance, yet qualifies his appraisal by solely crediting the Aryan influence for the rise of Japan to a world power status.³⁷ Accordingly, after the outbreak of the war, Japan gave in to German pressure and excluded all Jewish refugees from pursuing their profession. Despite Japan's hostile warfare, atrocities and imperialist ambitions, Nazi Germany was an even greater international aggressor, instigator of genocide and threat to the world. In this regard, one of the bitter facts of history is the different treatment of ethnic Japanese and ethnic Europeans – Germans and Italians – on US American soil after the outbreak of the war.³⁸ By methods of selective internment and exclusions based on President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 (mainly geared towards Japanese Americans), it is estimated that some 11,000 persons of German ancestry were apprehended or interned as well, often until after the war³⁹ – a history barely researched or taught. Yet over all, "German

37 Hausmann, Frank Rutger. "Das Bild einer musterhaften Erziehung: Zen in der Kunst des Brückenschlagens: Deutsche Professoren in Japan als Kulturbotschafter Hitlers," in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, August 15, 2008, 36. Many years before, in 1905, Theodore Roosevelt had argued similarly in his attempt to halt Russian expansion by planning to allow the "natural leader" Japan to take over parts of China and Korea and protect American "strategic and economic interests" in the region: "Japan is the only nation in Asia that understands the principles and methods of Western civilization" (as quoted in: Steel, Ronald. "Theodore Roosevelt, Empire Builder," [book review] in: *The New York Times Book Review* (April 25, 2010), 8.

38 Internment of "enemy aliens" was not exclusive to the United States. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, its northern neighbor Canada also interned about 22,000 Japanese Canadians living in British Columbia, 14,000 of which were Canadian citizens. Already during World War I, another ethnic group, in this case about 5,000 Ukrainian men of Austro-Hungarian citizenship, were imprisoned as "enemy aliens" throughout Canada, a seasoned and widely spread practice by all nations involved in warfare with each other.

39 See Ebel, Karen E. "German-American Internees in the United States during WWII," <<http://www.traces.org/germaninternees.html>> (August 8, 2007). "During WWII, some 10,000 Italian immigrants were displaced, another 50,000 lived under strict curfew, while others spent months or years in internment camps. Germans, just as the Japanese, bore the enemy-alien designation label and its restrictions on their civil liberties, until the end of the war"; see Goodyear, Sarah.

Americans were distinguished from the Nazis and Italian Americans were distinguished from the Fascists. However, no differentiating nomenclature existed for the Japanese.”⁴⁰ After all, racism directed towards the latter was of an altogether different kind:

We believe that when we are dealing with the Caucasian race we have methods that will test the loyalty of them, and we believe that we can, in dealing with the Germans and the Italians, arrive at some fairly sound conclusions because of our knowledge of the way they live in the community and have lived for many years. But when we deal with the Japanese we are in an entirely different field and we cannot form any opinion that we believe to be sound.⁴¹

In addition, famous German exiles such as “Thomas Mann and Bruno Walter urged the government not to lock up German refugees who fled the Nazi regime as ‘enemy aliens,’ and in San Francisco Joe DiMaggio’s mother spoke on behalf of Italian-Americans.”⁴² As much as it is forever intertwined, German and Japanese history during and after World War II was marked by substantial differences for the immigrants and descendants of those two countries residing in the mainland US. Establishing another parallel despite the obvious dissimilarities, prior

“When Being Italian was a Crime,” *Village Voice*, April 18, 2000, 50-52, 55. “During the Second World War about 11,000 German-Americans were interned. Neither subversion, treason nor espionage was ever proved against anyone. The Germans stayed in detention through the war and, in a number of cases, even beyond. The detention had one objective only: To intimidate the German-American population”; see Szamuely, George. “Demons du Jour,” in: *New York Press*, 5-11 January 2000, 9, 15, 9.

40 Renteln, Alison Dundes. “A Psychohistorical Analysis of the Japanese American Internment,” in: *Human Rights Quarterly* 17, 4 (1995), 618-648, 621.

41 California Attorney General Earl Warren, as quoted in Renteln, 622.

42 Duus, Masayo. *The Life of Isamu Noguchi: Journey without Borders*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 2004, 165.

to focusing on the art created in and inspired by the Japanese American internment camp experience, it may be worthwhile to examine at least in passing the great abundance of literature on the art and art theory revolving around Nazi concentration camps only insofar as its intersecting trajectory purveys meaning for the former.⁴³

43 The focus of this study unfortunately does not allow for a more thorough comparative examination of art and literature created in repressive environments such as ghettos, prisons, totalitarian governments, in captivity in general or even in the Gulag, the study of which also calls for outside references, as has been demanded before: "The Gulag must be subjected to serious cross-national comparative study to determine how it relates to an array of detention institutions and practices – including, but not limited to, prisons ghettos exile, Nazi concentration and death camps, Native American reservations and Japanese-American internment camps." See Barnes, Steven A. "Researching Daily Life in the Gulag," in: *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 1, 2 (2000), 377-390, 388. For the intertextual benefits of cross-referencing through a transnational approach toward creative possibilities within suppressive systems, see Frye Jacobson, Matthew. "A Ghetto to Look Back To: *World of Our Fathers*, Ethnic Revival, and the Arc of Multiculturalism," in: *American Jewish History* 88, 4 (2000), 463-474. A close reading of Irving Howe, for example, may turn the "gaze outward" and arrive at an "ethnic consciousness" larger than one's own background (472). For the topicality of the subject matter, see the minutes of the international symposium "Camp Literature in a Comparative Perspective" at the Warburg Haus in Hamburg, Germany, December 4-6, 2014. See also the exhibition "Der Tod hat nicht das letzte Wort. Kunst in der Katastrophe, 1933-1945" at the Karl Löbe Haus, German Bundestag, January 28-February 27, 2015, as well as Jürgen Kaumkötter's publication of the same name (Berlin: Galiani, 2015).