

## John Okada

Born in Seattle, Washington, John Okada (1923–1971) was educated at the University of Washington and Columbia University and served in the Air Force during World War II. He was an obscure writer during his lifetime, and when his most important novel, *No-No Boy*, came out, it received little attention. The novel was rediscovered during the 1970s by a group of Asian American writers, and since then it has found much acclaim.

*No-No Boy* is one of the first Japanese American novels. Okada wrote about the Japanese internment camps and the adjustment soldiers faced returning from war, as well as the struggles within Japanese communities. This excerpt is the preface to the novel and provides the backdrop for the struggles of Okada's character, Ichiro, and his family.

### From *No-No Boy*

#### Preface

December the Seventh of the year 1941 was the day when the Japanese bombs fell on Pearl Harbor.

As of that moment, the Japanese in the United States became, by virtue of their ineradicable brownness and the slant eyes which, upon close inspection, will seldom appear slanty, animals of a different breed. The moment the impact of the words solemnly being transmitted over the several million radios of the nation struck home, everything Japanese and everyone Japanese became despicable.

The college professor, finding it suddenly impossible to meet squarely the gaze of his polite, serious, but now too Japanese-ish star pupil, coughed on his pipe and assured the lad that things were a mess. Conviction lacking, he failed at his attempt to be worldly and assuring. He mumbled something about things turning out one way or the other sooner or later and sighed with relief when the little fellow, who hardly ever smiled and, now, probably never would, stood up and left the room.

In a tavern, a drunk, irrigating the sponge in his belly, let it be known to the world that he never thought much about<sup>o</sup> the sneaky Japs and that this proved he was right. It did not matter that he owed