Fusao Inada
by Shawn Holliday

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Lawson Fusao Inada

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INADA, FAMILY #19228

On February 19, 1942, approximately ten weeks after Japanese fighter planes attacked the American naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt approved Executive Order 9066, which authorized the removal of all people of Japanese descent from vulnerable areas of the United States' west coast. Meant as a security measure to protect the dams, power plants, harbors, railroads, and airports from spies who would attempt to compromise America's vulnerable infrastructure, this order eventually led to the complete removal of all Japanese from Arizona, California, Oregon, and Washington, relocating 120,000 people by mid-1942 (Only What xi-xii). Such actions were fueled as much by hysteria and fear concerning a possible invasion as they were by sixty years of racism that began in the 1880s with the first wave of Japanese immigration.

As early as 1922, the United States Supreme Court determined that all Issei, first-generation Japanese immigrants, were ineligible for American citizenship due to their non-white skin color. Even more exclusionary was the Immigration Act of 1924, which Congress passed to prohibit any further Japanese immigration to the U.S. During the late 1920s, many western states also restricted Japanese land ownership and ordered proprietors of Japanese businesses to identify their nationality on signs displayed in storefront windows (In This Great Land 28). By the time of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, many resident aliens and
their American-born Nisei children and Sansei grandchildren felt like second-class citizens whose insecurity and paranoia proved justified. Soon after the U.S. declared war on the Empire of Japan, all persons of Japanese ancestry living within the nation's borders were deemed "enemy aliens" who posed a serious threat to national security.

Three months after President Roosevelt approved Executive Order 9066, Lieutenant General of the U.S. Army J. L. DeWitt issued Civil Exclusion Order 82, which commanded all people of Japanese descent to report to their local Civil Control Station for immediate evacuation to one of sixteen centrally located Assembly Centers. DeWitt's order allowed evacuees to take only what they could carry with them, which needed to include bedding, linens, toilet articles, extra clothing, and a few personal effects (*Only What* 8-9). Before this removal, the U.S. government closed all Japanese banks, froze all Japanese assets, and seized such contraband as guns, short wave radios, and cameras from all Japanese homes. These future evacuees were also required either to sell their homes and businesses or to loan them to "legitimate" U.S. citizens for safekeeping (xi-xii, 3). They had no choice but to discard the rest of their possessions before their forced evacuation. Anything left behind was often looted or pilfered immediately following their departure.

After spending three to four months in the Assembly Centers, the Japanese internees were relocated to ten permanent camps in some of the most remote desert and swampland areas of the country's interior (xi). The U.S. Army quickly constructed the camps, giving them an impermanent, makeshift appearance. Once here, the Japanese internees spent over three years dealing with boredom, depression, inadequate space, lack of privacy, interminable heat during the summers and cold during the winters, inedible food, stomach disorders, open toilets, and inadequate medical care. Here they remained for the duration of World War II.
Lawson Fusao Inada was only four years old when he and his parents were forced to leave their home in Fresno, California, for internment in the relocation camps. After spending four months in Fresno’s Assembly Center, where the Inadas were assigned identification #19228 (xxi; Legends vi), the future poet and his extended family were moved a disorienting 1,800 miles southeast to live in the muddy swampland of Jerome Camp, Arkansas, located ironically close to “The Trail of Tears,” the path the Cherokee nation used a century earlier when President Andrew Jackson forced their migration westward. Here they stayed for two years, where their life consisted of armed soldiers, barbed-wire fences, ever-present mud, and humiliating living conditions. In September 1944, the Inada family was forced to move once again since the government needed “escape-proof” Jerome Camp to house captured enemy Storm troopers (Salisbury, “Dialogue” 63). This time, the Inadas traveled 1,000 miles westward to Amache Camp in Grenada, Colorado, located in the middle of a barren desert close to the slopes of the Rocky Mountains (Legends vi), an environment as different from Fresno’s city life as Jerome, Arkansas, had been. At such an impressionable age, young Lawson found himself bereft of home and country, having a suspect identity, facing an uncertain future.

Although World War II ended when Lawson Inada was seven years old, his three years of internment profoundly determined the rest of his life, influencing him both as a man and as a poet. For almost forty years he has dedicated his life to teaching college and writing poetry. Through his work with young adults, he fosters greater cross-cultural understanding in the hope of producing a society more accepting and tolerant of minority art and culture. Subsequently, he attempts to break down the “them/us” barriers that exist between regions, races, and cultures to make a more inclusive America full of trusting, “decent” people (Salisbury,
“Dialogue” 63-64). In his poetry, he often returns to his years of childhood internment in order to achieve a better understanding of America’s ironic history and his own problematic, dual identity as an Asian-American. By documenting the stories of his friends, his parents, and his extended family, he offers a glimpse into the typical lives of early Japanese-Americans and the problems they faced in the western U.S. during the early- to mid-1900s. His books and anthologies fill an important but oft-ignored gap in American history and literature by lending a voice to the varied multicultural communities that make up such an essential part of west-coast culture. Even though he prefers the moniker “Camp Poet” to “Japanese-American Poet” (“A Letter” 29), sympathetically tying himself to the oppressed worldwide, his devotion to his people’s memories, desires, and fears has earned him the unofficial, but important, title, “Poet Laureate of Japanese America.”

“INADA” MEANS “RICEFIELD”

In 1896, Lawson Inada’s paternal grandfather, Mitsuji, emigrated from the rural farmlands of Kumamoto, Japan, to settle permanently in the United States, a voyage that took him more than nine years to make. After stopping to work on a sugarcane plantation in Hawaii (Legends v-vi), he saved enough money for his wife, Miju Murakami Inada, to leave the south island of Kyushu to join him, entrusting their only son and daughter to the community of Kumamoto to raise, a common occurrence with poor Japanese emigrants at the time (Drawing 31). By 1905, the couple finally saved enough money for passage to the United States, joining the second wave of Issei to hit the west coast since the 1880s, most of whom found work either as railroaders, lumberjacks, farmers, or fish cannery workers, filling a labor shortage caused by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which was still in effect (In This Great Land 8-11). For thirty-six years they continued their life together
as migrant sharecroppers, moving from farm to farm in California's San Jose region as economic circumstance dictated. However, by 1910 they were wealthy enough to bring their now teenage son, Yoshitaro, from Kyushu to live with them (Drawing 31). In that same year, their second son, Fusaji, was born in a noodle factory in the small town of Watsonville (56; Legends vi), being the first Nisei Inada to grace their new country.

More affluent than the Inadas, Lawson's maternal grandparents, Busuke and Yoshiko Saito, had a much easier time forging a life for themselves in the U.S. In 1907, they left Wakayama, a hamlet sandwiched between the cities of Osaka and Kyoto on the main island of Honshu, to settle in Fresno, California, located in the state's Great Central Valley region (Legends v, 48). By 1912, the couple had accumulated enough capital to establish the Fresno Fish Market, which served the dietary needs of the growing immigrant population. That same year, it also acted as a delivery room when Yoshiko gave birth to a daughter, Masako. The first of its kind in Fresno, the fish market became an institution on the West Side, bringing patrons from all parts of the city's multicultural "Chinatown" community (34-35). Amazingly, the Saitos even managed to keep it open during World War II, entrusting the store to loyal American friends of German and Italian descent until their hoped-for return. The Fresno Fish Market served its community for almost seventy years, closing for good in 1982 due to urban renewal (48). Today, however, it still stands in memory as a landmark establishment in western American history.

Like most Issei parents, the Inadas and the Saitos immigrated to better their children's lives, in the process hoping to grant them a good education, to increase their monetary wealth, and to strengthen family pride by helping them become distinguished members of their respective communities. In this, their Nisei children didn't disappoint. While Yoshitaro Inada became a farmer
like his parents, locally renowned for his ability to make things grow, his younger brother, Fusaji “Fuzzy” Inada, helped people by becoming a “teeth healer,” a practicing dentist (Salisbury, “Dialogue” 68). Of the five Saito children, which included a pharmacist and a dentist, Masako also chose a career as a public servant, becoming a teacher of preschool children (Legends 48). Such familial dedication to learning, hard work, and upward mobility continued with Fusaji and Masako when they married on August 22, 1936, proving beneficial during the difficult times they experienced living in the internment camps during World War II, and as they repaired their damaged life afterwards. For this reason, the couple instilled these same principles in their only son, Lawson, whose work would establish “Inada” as an important surname in American poetry and minority activism, a long way from the southern rice fields of Kyushu, Japan.

THE ABC'S OF LIFE

Lawson Fusao Inada was born on May 26, 1938, in Fresno, California, adding another member to the Central Valley Region’s ever-growing population of 25,000 Americans of Japanese descent. He experienced a fairly normal childhood as a prewar Sansei until 1942, when life dealt him two unusually harsh and almost simultaneous blows: his paternal grandmother, Miju Inada, passed away, and he found himself housed behind barbed wire, one of the youngest prisoners in Arkansas’ Jerome internment camp (Drawing 2). Ironically, the United States government deemed him an enemy alien even though he was four years old and a legal citizen of the country, a fate shared by most other west-coast Nisei and Sansei.

For a growing boy, camp life proved monotonous and boring with few toys or playmates, so the Inadas tried to establish a somewhat normal life for their sickly child through books and music. A
strong literary atmosphere existed in Jerome camp, which housed two free-verse haiku masters, Neiji Ozawa and Kyotaro Komuro, as well as members of their respective San Joaquin Valley poetry clubs: Valley Ginsha Haiku Kai of Fresno and the Delta Ginsha of Stockton (Only What 119). Ensuring that her son fit into this cultural tradition, Masako instilled in him a love of books and magazines early on, commodities hard to come by in camp but which always seemed to fill the Inadas’ wooden stall. Here, he read a wide array of books, including Winnie the Pooh, Babar, The Wind in the Willows, and animal stories by Thornton Burgess, as well as more sophisticated books later on by Robert Browning, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Walter de la Mare (Salisbury, “Dialogue” 62; Legends 147). While reading and developing a love of the English language filled Lawson’s early camp life, later at Amache, his father helped to nurture his second great love, music.

After relocation to Colorado, Fusaji and other male internees were “granted leave” for defense work in a munitions factory on the South Side of Chicago, where they were often mistaken for Mexicans. As presents for his son, he often bought records by such jazz artists as Fats Waller, Fatha Hines, and Lionel Hampton. Even though the Inadas had no phonograph in camp, Fusaji instead enchanted his son with mythic tales of the city and its music, talking of people with strange names like “Count,” “Bullmoose,” “Lux,” and “Lady Day,” and of an incredible blind piano player named Art Tatum. Instead of listening to the music, Lawson often escaped the dreariness of camp by looking at the different record labels, conjuring colorful images in his mind of the streets, people, and sounds that made up Chicago’s nightlife (Legends 55-56; Salisbury, “Dialogue” 70), an important activity for a young boy whose future lay in music-based, free-verse poetry.

After being released from Amache Camp at the end of World War II, the Inadas returned to Fresno’s West Side, where Fusaji
rebuilt his dentistry practice by saving money he earned by picking peaches and grapes (Drawing 56). Although Lawson would begin his formal education at Lincoln Grammar School ("A Letter" 27), it was Fresno’s rich multicultural community, made up largely of Asians, Blacks, and Chicanos, which taught him a more valuable set of ABCs (Legends 146). By the late 1940s, Fresno had one of the largest immigrant populations in California. Half of its citizens were foreign-born with children of forty-eight different nationalities peppering the city’s schools (33), many living on the city’s poorer West Side. While the more affluent and white East Side housed the city’s museums, concert halls, and libraries—purveyors of traditional “artistic” culture—the West Side was hardly impoverished by having folk festivals, shoe shine parlors, and pool halls fill its streets. Blues, jazz, country & western, and mariachi music often filled the air, encircling the area’s graffiti-splayed walls (48, 57). While many of the immigrants who lived on the West Side guarded and clung to their native traditions, these same traditions mingled with those of their neighbors, creating a rich cultural amalgam that gave Fresno’s West Side an unusual cosmopolitan flavor that the conservative East Side lacked.

Of the families that surrounded the Inadas’ newly rented house, Lawson immediately took up with the Palominos, a Mexican family with five children, two of whom, Herb and Henry, were close to him in age (Drawing 57). Through time, Lawson became the unofficial sixth child of the family, earning the nickname “Chano,” a derivation of the more formal Spanish neologism “Lasano” ("A Letter" 28). In the Palomo household his multicultural education really began. Though he knew only a limited amount of Japanese due to its prohibition in camp, English-speaking Lawson quickly became bilingual by learning Spanish through the family’s love of song. With them, he learned to eat tortillas, he listened to the music that drifted in from neighboring cantinas, and he often danced,
laughed, and sang during their family celebrations. He even worked with them in the fields during the summer when not busy at his grandparents' fish store. After four years of stifling life in camp and a reculturation period that consisted of neighborhood fights and school suspensions (Drawing 57; Salisbury, "Dialogue" 72), the Palominos gave the future poet a larger sense of belonging, opening him up to a wider world. As Chano, he started to see the goodness of life, replacing the ever-growing chip on his shoulder with a burgeoning work ethic and cultural affirmation.

During his early teen years, Lawson began visiting another neighborhood family that would deeply affect his life. The Joneses, African-Americans originally from southern Georgia, were neighbors of his Saito grandparents, who lived several blocks away from the Inada home. When he visited his grandparents he almost always called on his new friend, Sam Jones, whose father was both an area preacher and a great lover of music. As a preteen, Lawson had merely listened to the records his father brought him. His first serious study of music began, however, in the Jones household, which acted as a makeshift conservatory with a dazzling array of 78s that spanned decades and included a little bit of everything: gospel, jazz, and blues. Sam's father oversaw the spiritual side of their musical education while his older brother took care of the secular portion, which heavily emphasized contemporary jazz (Drawing 57-58; Salisbury, "Dialogue" 73). Of everyone, Sam Jones was possibly Lawson's most important teenage friend. They were together in Mr. Bramblett's senior Civics class at Edison High School in mid-March 1955 when a fellow student solemnly informed them of Charlie Parker's death (Legends 58). At night, they would sometimes sneak out of their respective homes to listen to the latest jazz artists playing at the local Palomar Ballroom. Later, the Inadas even took the boys to a concert in San Francisco to hear Sarah Vaughan, Roy Haines, Oscar Peterson,
and Ray Brown as a graduation present. In return, Sam had his parents display Lawson’s picture on the same shelf with the rest of his family’s, conferring on him a familial place of honor. Years earlier, a picture of him had made a similar appearance in the Palomino household (Salisbury, “Dialogue” 73), showing that his childhood influence had been mutually appreciated.

Lawson’s formative years in Fresno, spent with many diverse Asians, Blacks, and Chicanos, affected his life profoundly. As an adult, he became less interested in mining his ancestral Japanese culture and more interested in exploring his split identity as a Japanese-American and the problems he faces as a cultural minority. With few Japanese families in his neighborhood, his youthful influences were multiethnic. Subsequently, his poems often refer back to his youth, where he depicts the people, places, and music that defined him as a distinct person. By tracing the intersection of these multiple influences, he presents himself as a typical “American,” who is affected daily by various beliefs, ideologies, and cultures, rather than as a representative “Japanese-American,” a label that restricts his complex identity. He would rather see himself as a citizen of the world than as a “quaint Oriental writer” or as a member of a specific “tribe” or “clan” (Kondo), both of which place him within prepackaged stereotypes.

**THE POETRY ROAD**

For the first ten years of his adult life, Lawson Inada traveled the country with little formal direction, following his destiny as a poet. After spending the 1955-56 academic year studying at Fresno State College, he transferred in his sophomore year to the University of California, Berkeley, where he neglected his school work in favor of hanging out at Oakland’s Blackhawk Club, hearing the likes of Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Lester Young, Dinah Washington, Count Basie, and Billie Holiday, an experience he
refers to now as his “real” education. In San Francisco in 1957, he had the good fortune of actually meeting “Lady Day,” or Billie Holiday, whom he calls “the greatest artistic/cultural anything I have ever had the fortune of experiencing in my life” (Salisbury, “Dialogue” 74; Krysl 16). America’s most famous jazz singer at the time, Holiday was best known for her unique phrasing, often anticipating a beat or lagging behind it, wrapping her lyrics around the accompanying music in a soloist’s fashion. She signed her autograph for Inada outside the club in the foggy cold, realizing that she had noticed him in the audience the previous evening but unaware that she had changed the direction of his life forever (Legends 58). Later that night, back in Berkeley, he wrote his first poem (“A Letter” 28), an homage to her. Just two years later, Holiday died in a New York hospital, a troubled heroin addict under arrest for possession of the drug. [For a good introduction to the development of jazz see Ken Burns’s ten-part documentary and accompanying book, Jazz: A History of America’s Music; for a discussion of the genre’s major figures see Keith Shadwick’s Encyclopedia of Jazz and Blues.]

The next academic year found Inada back at Fresno State College, where he stayed until earning his B.A. in 1959. Here, he studied poetry formally under Philip Levine, for whom he wrote his first “official,” academic poem, an apprentice work about Charlie Parker written in traditional iambic pentameter couplets (“A Letter” 28). Although Levine had not yet published a book, his own use of familial themes, colloquial diction, and experimental jazz techniques further influenced the budding poet, as did his dictum for students to build a solid reading regimen (Salisbury, “Dialogue” 74). As Inada remembers:

Phil Levine was my undergraduate “conservatory”; he was a formalist, a taskmaster on metrics, scansion; from him, I gained a hands-on working knowledge of the finer points of
the tradition. He gave me affirmation, confirmation, and became my vocational role-model—a true teacher and a true poet. (Inada, Letter)

After giving him early direction, Levine helped Inada secure a fellowship to the University of Iowa, where he further honed his poetic craft as a member of the acclaimed Writers' Workshop.

While at Iowa, Inada became friends with fellow poet Michael S. Harper, now known for such important musical poems as "Dear John, Dear Coltrane" and "Reuben, Reuben." Sharing a love of jazz, both roamed the stacks of Iowa's library to search out "new" writers who would open them to different literary traditions and techniques, allowing them to broaden their burgeoning poetic vision. Besides being turned on to such writers as Richard Wright, Robert Hayden, Kenneth Rexroth, Pablo Neruda, and the African writer Ananzi, Inada also took his first formal class in Asian literature during this period, taught at Iowa by a visiting Chinese professor (Salisbury, "Dialogue" 66-67). Another student enrolled in the Writers' Workshop at the time was a woman who eventually became the love of Inada's life, Janet Francis, a native of southern Missouri who had grown up in the Ozark Mountains economically poor but rich in family tradition and regional heritage (64). Her influence on Inada's work is inestimable. More than anything, she exposed her future husband to America's southern white culture and softened his attitude toward white Americans by being open-minded and prejudice-free. Many of Inada's early poems, including "In a Storm" and "Sequence for Janet," are about their relationship. The couple married on February 19, 1962.

With his new wife, Inada left the University of Iowa a few months later without earning a degree. Instead, he headed to the east coast, where he settled in Durham, New Hampshire, situated just a few miles off the Atlantic Ocean. Here, he taught as an instructor at the University of New Hampshire, but stayed only
three years due to poor salary and homesickness for the west coast, with its Asian-American population. Subsequently, he headed back west in 1965 to finish his graduate study at the University of Oregon, where he earned his M.F.A. degree a year later. Apparently, Inada then felt it time to settle down to raise a family and to write seriously after a decade of roaming. At age 28, he began teaching writing and literature at Southern Oregon State College (now Southern Oregon University), where he has remained ever since. In Ashland, he not only helped his wife raise two sons, Miles and Lowell—named after jazz trumpeter Miles Davis and confessional poet Robert Lowell—but he has also forged a name for himself as the central poet, historian, and scholar of the Japanese-American internment experience.

**EARLY POEMS: PLUCKING OUT A RHYTHM**

Throughout the late 1960s, Lawson Inada published his work in a wide array of periodicals of varying quality. In 1970, however, a major break came with *3 Northwest Poets*, a small book of approximately sixty pages that sandwiches Inada’s poems between those of Albert Drake and Douglas Lawder, two other graduates of the University of Oregon’s Creative Writing Program who also served as staff members to the *Northwest Review* (Salisbury, “Introduction” 4, 6). Of the three, Inada was the most prolific but least known. Only one of his poems collected here, “A Son in the House,” had been published previously, appearing in *December* magazine.

*3 Northwest Poets* finds a young Inada searching for his voice. Poems about his wife and sons, which bookend his section, are interrupted by such diverse topics as *American Bandstand*, spousal abuse, world peace, and self-loathing. Though little here anticipates the cultural archaeology that would occupy much of Inada’s work for the next thirty years, these poems do offer early glimpses
into the poet's burgeoning use of autobiographical material. These nine poems intentionally move from domestic complacency to worldly discontent, showing the daily joys and sorrows of Inada's life in the confessional vein, his dominant literary influence.

The book's first poem, "Little Miles," presents a father reveling in love for his toddler son, a fairly nonexistent theme in Asian-American writing until now:

Lately, my front teeth have been aching,
and my lips are always rough.
The doctor says: "You're laughing too much."

And that's how much I love my only son. (26)

By the end of his section of poems, however, Inada moves away from such tranquil, domestic settings to the harsh racism of the outside world. The happy tone of the earlier poems grows progressively angrier. In the last poem, "Down by the Shoreline," Inada again writes of Miles, but here the poet becomes infuriated by the reaction his son provokes in a white public servant: "When a ranger tells him / where to piss, / I could boot out his teeth, / bloody his badge and suit" (42), a much different image from the happy one presented earlier. For the rest of the poem, Inada finds it hard to cool down, even though he knows the "niggers," "spicks," "chinks," and "Jews" who camp close by will support his cause if he is arrested (43). However, instead of breaking into violent action, he once again takes comfort in his family, the predominant theme of these poems. With his wife, he attempts to build "a fire in the gathering storm" (45), a metaphor for their relationship, which provides his only insulation from the hostility of an outside world that thinks in terms of race and the color line.

A year later, Inada expanded on the issue of racism in "West Side Songs," a poetic sequence included in Down at the Santa Fe
Depot: 20 Fresno Poets, a little-known anthology that collects the work of such other hometown luminaries as Philip Levine, Larry Levis, Robert Mezey, and Roberta Spear. Here, Inada undercuts the positive effects of Fresno’s cultural diversity by employing a racist discourse that reflects the negative stereotypes, hatred, and misunderstandings that exist between different ethnic groups, documenting a hurting, segregated city on the verge of implosion. Inada leaves no ethnic group unscathed. Mexicans, blacks, Okies, Armenians, Filipinos, Chinese, and Japanese are all treated alike by Inada’s satiric tongue. His racist male narrator refers to Armenians as hairy “Fresno Jews” (51), thinks of an immigrant Okie as a “a white man gone fake— / play-acting, a spy” (50), and shows prejudice toward the Chinese by quoting his grandmother, who worries about the effects of intermarriage: “Marry a Mexican, / a Nigger, just don’t / marry no Chinese” (52). In the poem’s final section, Inada also presents the racist stereotype of Japanese-Americans who “hate / everyone else,” including themselves, “on the sly” (53). However, in the poem’s last sentence, left purposely open-ended without a period, the narrator takes a definite stand, writing “I / used to be / Japanese” (emphasis added) (53). This act of open defiance shows Inada’s attempt to break out of such stereotypes by highlighting their ridiculousness. With this confrontational poem, he encourages other ethnic writers to do the same. Trying to claim a voice outside of traditional, false notions of “Oriental,” “Asian,” and “Japanese” would remain a predominant theme in Inada’s work for the rest of his career. His earliest concentrated step in this direction occurred in his first volume of poetry.

In 1971, Inada’s first full-length book, Before the War: poems as they happened, appeared, a revised version of his 1966 M.F.A. thesis “The Great Bassist.” Notably, it was the first poetry collection by an Asian-American to be published by a major New York
house, William F. Morrow (Aiiieeeee! xxxii). The book's title refers both to Inada's idyllic childhood before his World War II confinement and to the decade he freely roamed the U.S. twenty years later, before the full escalation of the Vietnam War. Hence, the title reflects the parallax view of Inada's life presented throughout the volume. Poems about the late 1930s create a constant dialogue with poems about the early 1960s, showing how the poet's childhood internment caused problems of race and identity that he now must solve in adulthood, a constant poetic theme. As in all of his books, background always informs foreground.

This intricate view operates throughout Before the War's seven sections. For instance, two of the three poems in the book's first section, "Plucking Out a Rhythm," juxtapose brief depictions of prewar family life in Fresno with extended, violent scenes of life in the internment camps. "From Our Album" shows a household with two family dogs, building reader expectation of a tranquil, homey picture, before revealing that the shepherd dog, Jimmie, starved himself in loyalty to the family after evacuation, both undercutting and displacing the reader's conventional poetic notions. For the rest of the poem's six sections, Inada jumps to camp life, presenting various scenes from a soldier shooting a stray dog through the head for no good reason to another one smashing a tortoise with the butt of his rifle. Showing the effects of violent camp life on a fragile childhood psyche, Inada later reveals himself as a boy who "jerks the eyes / from birds, feet / from lizards, / and punishes / ants with the gaze / of a glass" (Before 19), emulating the disorienting, cruel world he no longer understands.

Similarly, "Father of My Father" explores the effects of internment on Inada's paternal grandfather, Mitsuji Inada. In the poem's center, we learn about Mitsuji's prewar life through what he has lost: his wife, his home, his crops. Upon internment, he loses his identity entirely. Here, Inada uses his grandfather as the
You wondered who you were. You couldn’t move. (22)

The fifty or so lines that surround these stanzas, emulating a barbed-wire fence enclosing camp, show that Mitsuji copes with internment by clinging to Japanese tradition and by gardening. Inada’s regretful tone in the poem’s fourth section, however, lets readers know that his grandfather’s way of life has vanished forever. Whereas Mitsuji lost himself in camp as an old man, Inada, as a young poet, must find himself by rebuilding and cultivating these traditions in new ways. Even though he would not “hold” his grandfather when he was alive (23), he embraces him now as a symbol of what the exiled Japanese-Americans had lost in camp, both their identity and their unique way of life. More than anything, “Father of My Father” begins the poetic process that occupies Inada’s writing for the rest of his career, resurrecting the life and work of prewar Japanese-Americans to forge a solid postwar identity that operates outside of racist white notions.

Most of the poems in the following six sections of Before the War move away from the 1930s and 40s to depict Inada as an adult wandering the U.S. in the early 1960s. Here, he attempts to find ways to express himself as an American of Japanese descent who
constantly carries the baggage of camp life with him, rejecting the idea of a dual “American” and “Japanese” identity. The book’s second, third, and fourth sections, “Into the Open,” “Utica, North Platte,” and “In These Encounters,” recount Inada’s time spent in the midwest as a man in his early twenties. Here, he searches for an America that embraces him as well as one that he, in turn, can embrace.

While “Into the Open” contains three fairly innocuous love poems to his wife, Janet, the five poems that make up “Utica, North Platte” are much more troublesome. At first glance, they look like short, imagistic poems that present traditional pictures of America’s midwest, where Inada attended graduate school. Sagebrush, sand, barren hills, mosquitoes, cattle, and June beetles appear amid movie screens, crop dusters, truck drivers, and liquor. However, something dark lurks underneath the surface, coloring the untraditional associations these images evoke in Inada’s mind. The hot sand, circling hawks, and dead carrion in “The Source” remind Inada of life in Amache camp, a dead place “where / postmen rarely / tread” (40). In the next poem, “Disease,” Inada clarifies his racial problem. While looking at an unidentified man at a movie theater, he realizes that “This is his / country” (41), not mine, an especially apt realization in a region of the country not known for its large Asian-American population. This experience in America’s heartland only confirms Inada’s lack of cultural identity, which causes his collapse into nothingness: “I die. // I will not breathe” (42). Being in a country where “American” usually means “white” and where Japanese cultural influence is fairly nonexistent makes Inada feel vanquished as both a man and a poet.

To fight such inertia, Inada’s next section of poems, “In These Encounters,” becomes politically charged, depicting his growing activism and discontent upon his move to New England. “Children of Somersworth” documents the shameful death of a small New
Hampshire town that leaves destruction and emptiness in its industrialized wake. The mills have fled south to take advantage of cheap labor, the local farmland is unproductive, and the Salmon Falls River is polluted. Only a shoe factory and tannery remain. To Inada, the town’s citizens are like sleeping children kept ignorant of their situation by the dominant institutions of church and state, which he attempts to undermine to initiate change against the status quo.

In “Hunters,” Inada again confronts a passive, unquestioning world. Unlike the sleeping children of Somersworth, Inada, as adult poet, now opposes the cruel and needless killing of animals, which builds a defiant, intertextual response to the volume’s first camp poem “From Our Album,” where Inada, as a small child, remained helpless to stop such killing. In four separate sections of “Hunters,” Inada depicts the violent deaths of two whales, a deer, and a dog. In part one, Inada criticizes the hypocrisy of the average American family that never questions the source of its food on the dinner table, eating gluttonously after church:

This Sunday, grace still ringing,
as you settle with your family to the food—
whale steaks, whale soup—
in your scrumptious whale suit,
tell me, is it good?

Is it good? (51-52)

The demand for these animals keeps hunters employed supplying them, even though whales are an endangered species. To implicate the reader's guilt in this process, Inada graphically describes the death of a whale in part two:
I saw hunters moving to the kill . . .

And when the lead bull fell,
the herd
chose not to run,
bobbing about the bull as if to buoy him up,
as if to save him somehow
from what struck them all to slow,
mute writhing . . .

And blood was all there was
to mingle with the sea; icebergs in the distance
northward bound to their own destruction—
sullen, dripping grief . . . (52)

Inada uses the accompanying whales here ironically, showing their humanity in the face of slaughter by men perched on a gunboat, a “floating factory decked out in artillery” that turns killing into a mindless, inhuman operation (51). To his credit, Inada also implicates himself in the slaughter of animals. However, unlike the hunters who kill deer for sport in part three, Inada recounts accidentally killing a dog with his car, pausing just long enough to glance back at the “broken, flapping mass” before moving on (54), indicting his own environmental carelessness.

The last three sections of *Before the War*, “Coming into Oregon,” “Don’t Know,” and “The Stand,” depict Inada’s condition as a Japanese-American and the problems of identity that result. After the scatological poem, “Three O’clock,” in which Inada places the reader into an oppressive world of enema tubes, shit, riots, and S & H Green Stamps (82-85), he moves into poems that protest the Vietnam War, an especially sensitive topic for an American poet of Asian ancestry. Next, Inada focuses on jazz, the prevailing aesthetic for the book’s last two sections. Here, he defiantly rejects
white culture. Instead, he aligns himself with African-Americans, who have invented their own distinct subculture within American society (Aiiieeeel xxv). While they have influenced everything from fashion and cuisine to body language, Inada is most interested in black music and the way it reshapes American language for his own use.

In “Bandstand,” culled from 3 Northwest Poets and reprinted in the “Don’t Know” section of Before the War, Inada rails against white America by indicting the falseness of American Bandstand, a whitebread, “Top 40” dance show broadcast from Philadelphia, a city with a large black population underrepresented on the hokey telecast. Like the soulless popular music the show promotes, everything is carefully constructed for conservative, middle-class consumption: the dancers have been “carefully screened,” camera angles carefully chosen, and Dick Clark innocuously pops his gum on camera, even though off-screen he cockily “struts it into the men’s room // for a smoke, to contemplate / a pimple, to ponder whether to get a new / tattoo and join the Merchant Marines, / for kicks” (98-99)—a different picture of “every mother’s son” than is seen in American homes (98). Inada wants no part of this fake world where everything is judged on outer appearance and deception. Instead, he chooses the music of Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Billie Holiday, and Charles Mingus—music based more on experimentation, improvisation, and spontaneity than on conservatively constructed iconography.

In “The Journey,” Inada depicts his conscious choice of these jazz forerunners as poetic models, employing a river metaphor to show his intended direction. When he writes, “I don’t know how long we floated—// our craft so full of music, / the night so full of stars” (121), he puns on the word “craft,” which lumps the poet and musicians together in the same boat (“craft”), showing the extent to which music informs his carefully constructed poetry (“craft”).
Similarly, *Before the War*’s last poem, “The Great Bassist,” shows Inada’s identification with black experiences by honoring Charles Mingus. Recounting here his own failed attempts at playing the bass guitar, Inada likens its strings to the “lacerations / of a master’s whip” (122). In essence, he becomes a slave to the instrument, unable to please it. Later in the poem, however, Inada realizes that music is a greater metaphor for life, which is what *Before the War* is about, tracing Inada’s development from an insecure child to adult poet and the important stops he made along the way. He abandons the bass, takes up poetry, and writes free verse in the musical vein.

Although “The Great Bassist” brings Lawson Inada’s first full-length book to a close, it also delivers us back to the volume’s first poem, “Plucking Out a Rhythm.” Here, Inada foreshadows his emulation of African-American models as a way to forge his own distinct identity as an Asian-American, one who constantly questions the ideologies of dominant white culture. Doing so helps him work against ingrained “Oriental” stereotypes by excavating the last bits of Japanese culture that died through immigration and internment (Sato, “Lawson Inada’s Poetics” 140). With the poem, Inada also acknowledges the parallax view that functions throughout *Before the War*. Even though he has arrived as a mature poet by book’s end, he constantly glances over his shoulder to the failings, revisions, and small triumphs that got him there. More than anything, *Before the War* charts Inada’s development as a poet, chronicling his early attempts at finding a voice through the metaphor of learning to play a seemingly simple, but sophisticated tune.

Upon its publication in 1971, *Before the War* was generally ignored by the reading public. Most large periodicals refused to review it. Subsequently, it sold poorly, as most poetry books do, and quickly went out of print (Aiiiiieee! xxxii-xxxiii). At the time, no significant ethnic audience yet existed for the book. Mainstream
readers weren't prepared for it either, unable to face a confrontational minority voice that did not embrace the “Oriental” stereotype of complacency, happiness, and cultural obligation. It would be years before a large New York house would publish another Asian-American writer. As of this writing, that writer would not be Inada.

CLAIMING A VOICE: THE AIIIEEEEE BOYS AND THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL METHOD

Even though Lawson Inada continued to write creatively, consistently placing his poems in such periodicals as The Yardbird Reader, The Greenfield Review, Caliban, and Amerasia, his next full-length volume of poetry, Legends from Camp, did not appear for more than twenty years, in 1992. In the interim, Inada acted more as a scholar than as a poet, helping to resurrect the forgotten writings of his country’s earliest Asian-American authors by unearthing them for detailed study and scholarly discussion. His seminal work on John Okada and Toshio Mori, his help in compiling the first major Asian-American literature anthology, and his dedication in documenting the Japanese-American internment experience make him a central figure in both the development of Ethnic Studies programs and in the establishment of Asian-American literature as a legitimate field of study. Without his effort and dedication, our conception of what constitutes American literature would be much different than it is today.

In 1970, Chinese-American prose writer and dramatist Jeffery Chan discovered a copy of John Okada’s only published novel, No-No Boy (1957), in a used bookstore in San Francisco (Inada, Introduction iii). Unknown to Chan at the time, he had stumbled upon an obscure treasure, the first Japanese-American novel (Aiiiiiiii! xxxv). After reading the book, he understood its importance in presenting the plight of Nisei who suffered from an
unstable postwar identity, shattered by internment and questioned loyalty. In the novel’s foreground, Okada’s hero, Ichiro, has answered “no” to questions 27 and 28 on the Loyalty Questionnaire given to civil internees. In so doing, he has refused to swear loyalty to the United States and chooses not to serve in the American armed forces, offenses punishable by imprisonment. The novel opens with Ichiro at the end of World War II, depicting his difficulties with family, friends, and employers in the Seattle area as well as the guilt and pain he feels. Touched by the book’s raw emotional power, Chan passed No-No Boy on to Inada and other prominent figures in the west coast’s burgeoning Asian-American literary community: Chinese-American dramatist Frank Chin, Japanese-American bookstore owner David Ishii, and Chinese-American novelist and editor Shawn Wong. Together, they worked to establish the book’s cultural importance to an academic readership caught within the confines of an overwhelmingly Anglo-American, New Critical tradition, scholars who thought of Asian-American writing as having little or no “literary” value.

To combat this view, Inada and his colleagues included a section of No-No Boy in their groundbreaking 1974 book Aiiieee!: An Anthology of Asian-American Writers. Realizing that this gesture was not enough, they next decided to republish Okada’s novel at their own expense, at $600 apiece, even though the original publisher, Charles E. Tuttle, had not yet sold all 1,500 copies that made up the book’s initial 1957 press run (Inada, Introduction xxxvi). To create an audience for No-No Boy and other neglected writings by their Asian-American forerunners, Chin, Chan, Inada, and Wong formed the Combined Asian-American Resources Project (CARP), which was committed to establishing “the living tradition of Asian-American thought and action” (iii). After giving readings in community settings and after passing the book on to other west-coast writers, students, and academics, they republished
No-No Boy under their CARP imprint in 1976 (iii). It sold out quickly. Subsequently, CARP undertook a second printing a year later. By 1979, CARP had generated enough interest in the novel that the University of Washington Press took over publishing duties. No-No Boy has remained in print ever since.

Another major project the members of CARP undertook during the early 1970s was putting together additional material for Aiiieeeee!: An Anthology of Asian-American Writers. Largely, it was an act of cultural resurrection. The editors published out-of-print works by forgotten forerunners through which they hoped to document an Asian-American literary tradition. Notable as the first anthology of Asian-American writing collected and edited solely by Asian-Americans (Kondo), its purpose was to present works by both early and contemporary authors that opposed the “pushers of white American culture that pictured the yellow man as something that when wounded, sad, or angry, or swearing, or wondering whined, shouted, and screamed ‘aiiiiiiiiiii!’” (Aiiieeeee! vii). Instead of including works by Pardee Lowe, Jade Snow Wong, and Virginia Lee, writers whom the editors considered complicit in confirming racist, “Oriental” stereotypes, and intentionally ignoring the presentation of such fake caricatures as Charlie Chan and Fu Manchu in melodramatic novels (xiii), Chin, Chan, Inada, and Wong selected plays, novels, and short stories by such “serious” and unassimilated writers as Carlos Bulosan, Louis Chu, Oscar Peñaranda, and Hisaye Yamamoto to illustrate the “age, variety, depth, and quality of writing” that exists, establishing the fact that “Asian-American sensibilities and cultures [. . .] might be related to but are distinct from Asia and white America” (viii, xv). With this anthology, Inada and his colleagues not only helped to bring attention to oft-ignored writers whose works had been out of print for years, but they also helped to establish the debate about what actually constitutes American literature. Aiiieeeee! was a
first step for Asian-Americans in challenging conservative academic notions about the literary canon. Its importance to the establishment of multiculturalism within the discipline of literary studies cannot be overstated, despite criticism from feminist scholars for its lack of female writers. Still, debates about the legitimacy of Ethnic Studies and Cultural Studies programs continue to rage within colleges and universities across the country today, arguments created, in part, by the publication of *Aiïïïïïï! *and its indicting introduction.

Following his work on the groundbreaking Asian-American literature anthology, Inada next turned to helping excavate the narratives of Toshio Mori, the first Japanese-American short story writer, whose “The Woman Who Makes Swell Doughnuts” (1949) had been collected for a new audience in *Aiïïïïïï!*. With Mori, Inada felt particular kinship. Mori too had been unjustly interned by the American government, spending three years in Topaz Camp in south central Utah (Introduction, *Yokohama* xx). He was a writer whose entire career was negatively affected by bad timing.

Mori’s first book, *Yokohama, California*, had been scheduled for publication in 1942 by the small Idaho publishing company, Caxton Press (xviii-xxi). After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, however, the book’s publication was indefinitely shelved. In 1949, Caxton finally published Mori’s book, but due to lingering anti-Japanese sentiment, a politically conservative reading audience, and Caxton’s small publicity budget, *Yokohama, California* quickly disappeared. Even though it was an inoffensive collection of realistic vignettes about San Leandro, California, composed more in the vein of Sherwood Anderson and Ernest Hemingway than of any contemporary Japanese writer, the postwar American audience was ill-prepared for a book set in a fictional Japanese-American setting with an entire cast of Japanese characters. For these reasons, *Yokohama, California* stayed out of print for thirty-five years
until the University of Washington Press published it with a new introduction by Inada as a part of its growing Asian-American Studies series, joining Okada’s *No-No Boy*. A few years later, Inada would also write the introduction for *Unfinished Message: Selected Works of Toshio Mori*, which collects a novella, several short stories, and an interview, all previously unpublished.

Fueled by the increasing acceptance of minority writing on college campuses, Inada again joined his CARP collaborators in the late 1980s to edit a larger Asian-American literature anthology, this one humorously titled, *The Big Aiiieeee!: An Anthology of Chinese American and Japanese American Literature*. Much had changed in literature as an academic discipline during the seventeen years since the publication of their first anthology. Not only had a new generation of Asian-American writers begun writing and publishing, with greater academic acceptance and audience reception—Marilyn Chin, Kimiko Hahn, Li-Young Lee, David Mura, and Cathy Song, especially—but the theoretical landscape had changed as well, partly due to *Aiiieeee!’s* continued scholarly influence. More than ever, the editors were determined to lay the appropriate cultural, historical, and literary foundation for this new generation of writers and students. They remained defiant in their use of material, however, choosing only under-appreciated authors and those supposedly “true” to the Asian-American experience. As they state in the anthology’s introduction:

[... ] we offer a literary history of Chinese American and Japanese American writing concerning the real and the fake. We describe the real, from its sources in the Asian fairy tale and the Confucian heroic tradition, to make the work of these Asian American writers understandable in its own terms. We describe the fake—from its sources in Christian dogma and in Western philosophy, history, and literature—to make it clear why the more popularly known writers such as
Jade Snow Wong, Maxine Hong Kingston, David Henry Hwang, Amy Tan, and Lin Yutang are not represented here. Their work is not hard to find. (The Big Aiiieeeel! xv)

In putting together their anthology, Chan, Chin, Inada, and Wong firmly situate their own work within the “real” Asian-American tradition, placing themselves alongside short story writer Sui Sin Far, playwright Wakako Yamauchi, memoirist Monica Sone, and poet Wing Tek Lum. Inada includes five of his own poems while Frank Chin includes a scathing ninety-two-page essay entitled “Come All Ye Asian American Writers of the Real and the Fake” as well as one of his own short stories. This inclusion of their own work hurt The Big Aiiieeeel!’s reception.

More than anything, Chin’s essay and antagonistic attitude impacted the anthology negatively on college campuses by splitting Asian-American scholars into two separate camps, creating what is now commonly referred to as “the Chin-Kingston battle” (Goshert 2). Chin’s early criticism of Kingston’s feminist revision of historical sources and her non-use of Chinese material in The Woman Warrior (1989) as well as her aspiration toward the universal in her work prompted Chin to categorize her as a “fake” Asian-American writer in his attempt at definitive canon-making (12). This rigid attitude, however, created a backlash against Chin; feminist critics who laud Kingston’s accessibility and popular appeal for women readers now marginalize his work in academe. He is rarely taught in college classrooms today for his politically incorrect, “masculinist” stance as well as for his troubling exclusionary tactics (8). This has certainly hurt The Big Aiiieeeel!’s influence in the past decade. Although critics noted the volume’s heuristic value, many called the editors’ intentions into question. Chan, Chin, Inada, and Wong seemed to feel spiteful toward popular writers, to marginalize Asian-Americans whose ancestry lay outside of China and Japan, and to use the new anthology to create
an audience for their own work. For these reasons, *The Big Aiiieeee!* failed to have the same cultural impact as its forerunner.

Nonetheless, the second anthology's groundbreaking format created interest and lent it importance. Apparently influenced by Clifford Geertz's work in anthropology and by Stephen Greenblatt's work in English Renaissance literature, Chan, Chin, Inada, and Wong created one of the first New Historical literature anthologies. By collecting sections from *An English-Chinese Phrasebook*, some Cantonese folk rhymes, and several pen-and-ink drawings along with more traditional "literary" artifacts as poems, plays, short stories, novel excerpts, and memoirs, the editors of *The Big Aiiieeee!* sought to break down the barriers between "history" and "literature," accepting both as cultural artifacts that highlight the power structure and ensuing cultural codes that define a place or era. The texts presented here show how Chinese-Americans and Japanese-Americans have become shaped in public consciousness and how certain writers have resisted such ideological pigeonholing. While Inada agrees with Chin's strict historical method, his is more archaeological than polemical in nature. Inada recovers early Asian-American texts in order to understand the plight of ancestors in a hostile country, using texts as objects of study and appreciation through which he educates his audience on forgotten American history, in the process, making startling cross-cultural revelations. The value of *The Big Aiiieeee!* lay in its success in presenting a diverse set of documents through which readers could view a clearer picture of the ever-developing Asian-American experience. It also established a new blueprint for future minority anthologies, of which Jessica Hagedorn's *Charlie Chan is Dead* (1993) is an important example.

Inada would employ this New Historical approach to a greater degree in his most important scholarly endeavor to date, *Only What We Could Carry: The Japanese American Internment*
Experience. Published by Heyday Books in 2000 as a project for the California Civil Liberties Public Education Program, this anthology gives voice to the 120,000 Japanese-Americans imprisoned in ten camps spread across the United States during World War II. Inada brings together such varied cultural documents as newspaper editorials, cartoons, photographic essays, drawings, letters, selections from memoirs, poems, stories, dictionaries of slang terms, government documents, and detailed maps to create a balanced account of the political causes of internment, the abject picture of internees' life inside, and the long fight for reparation with the American government. Only What We Could Carry adds an untold chapter to the life of America during World War II. Its pliable, cross-disciplinary format allows for its use in a plethora of Humanities and Social Science departments in high schools, colleges, and universities across the country. It adds another story to the life of struggling Japanese-American immigrants and their families in America during the twentieth century.

Even if he had never written a single line of poetry, Lawson Inada's importance to minority literature and Ethnic Studies would be firmly established with his editorial work. Few creative writers are so astute as scholars. His tireless efforts in depicting the negative cultural effects of the Japanese-American internment experience and his dedication to giving a voice to other Asian-Americans' experiences, excavating and promoting forgotten artifacts, make him a central figure in American literature after World War II. These endeavors also give Inada's verse a new vigor, establishing him as a major voice in poetry as well.
"'GODDAMNIT LAWSON! WHY'NT YOU PLAY IN KEY AND
KEEP TO THE RHYTHM?': THE BUDDHA BANDITS DOWN
HIGHWAY 99

The title of this section comes from a line in Garret Hongo’s
poem, “Cruising 99,” one of the few intertextual moments that
occurs in The Buddha Bandits Down Highway 99, a collaborative
effort between Hongo, Inada, and Chinese-American writer Alan
Chong Lau. Although Hongo’s long poem inaugurates the volume,
it was Lau who came up with the idea of putting together a book
by Asian-American writers who had either grown up close to or
lived near Highway 99, the roadway that runs the length of
California’s Great Central Valley region. While African-Americans,
Armenians, Azoreans, Basques, Hmongs, Italians, Laotians, and
Mexicans had populated the area for decades, Lau received a grant
to depict Asian-Americans’ connection to the land and their influ-
ence on the region (Holliday, Personal Interview). In 1977, all
three poets read their work at California State University at Long
Beach, performing collectively as The Buddha Bandits, and they
published this book a year later, stressing the multicultural
plurality of the region while also alluding to its violent, mythic
past, appropriating the landscape for themselves through the ulti-
mate act of nonviolence, poetry, unlike other outlaws in the re-

gion’s history.

Inada’s main contribution to The Buddha Bandits was the
lengthy poem “I Told You So,” composed around 1969 or 1970,
which was also featured in the 1974 film documentary of the same
name (Holliday, Personal Interview; Kondo). Although not written
specifically for The Buddha Bandits, as Hongo’s poem had been, “I
Told You So” makes a nice counterpart to “Cruising 99” in its use
of jazz poetics. Hongo’s poem

was influenced by Chick Corea’s Romantic Warrior album,
from the Return to Forever period—the idea of textural

35
composition, characters signed through leitmotif, multiple narrative tracks, and a resolution in a symbolic figure [. . .] Coltrane is also an influence—the way “Equinox” works its repeat melodic phrasings [. . .] (Hongo, Letter)

“I Told You So” was composed in a similar vein. Inada establishes the refrain “I told you so / oh yes,” around which he depicts the California landscape, the varied people of Fresno, and his own personal remembrances in stanzas and lines of varying length, emulating the riffing and improvising of jazz musicians, much like John Coltrane in “My Favorite Things” or Sonny Rollins in “St. Thomas.” More than anything, it is a performance piece that calls for audience interaction, a genre Inada would exploit more later in his career. As he tells the reader in the poem’s preceding section, “A Note on the Music”:

Now it’s up to you to assume an active role [. . .] You can build the speed and intensity according to how you feel; myself, I tend to slow down, quietly, in the “peaceful” section, then rise for dancing and chanting at the “concluding” overture, which is not quite the same as an “end.” Changes in climate and latitude will happen on their own. Also, there are places for you to stretch out and improvise upon, if you’re “musically inclined,” as we all are. (The Buddha Bandits 73)

Even though Hongo acts as bandleader in “Cruising 99,” chastising Inada for changing direction, breaking rhythm, and spontaneously venturing outside the parameters set by his bass line (11), Inada more than shares Hongo’s jazz aesthetic; both poets duel in moments of textual dialogism. As Inada writes,

[. . .] my basic artistic and literary influence has always been jazz. That’s what reached me, touched me, formed me, and
informed me since childhood—and that’s the vision, provisions, that I took with me into the “literary world” [. . .] come blowing time, I’m in a jazz mode [. . .] these words, these phrases, gotta have some oomph, some swing to ’em, some nuances, dynamics, in the “notes” and pauses, and jazz, of course, can range from austere to the posterior, from formal to the normal, and then some. Looking back, I sense that jazz had to do with my spirit, heart, spirituality, opening me up to where I am now. (Letter)

Most of all, jazz is democratic, calling for the participation and enjoyment of all involved, a communal feeling Inada also expresses in his poetry.

When considered in the context of Aiiiiieee!, The Buddha Bandits down Highway 99 further established the solidarity of male writers who worked together to depict the unique experience of living as Asians in America. It also expresses their indebtedness to western landscape, which often serves as inspiration and muse. A book such as The Buddha Bandits, with its images of Mount Shasta, Vero Beach, and the Santa Fe Railroad, shows Hongo’s, Lau’s, and Inada’s attempt to forge a home in the American west, a place they can identity with and attach themselves to. Garret Hongo would explore this connection between “place” and “home” years later in 1995’s Volcano, A Memoir of Hawaii, where he uses landscape as a metaphor for permanence and attachment. Inada would also explore this theme in his second book, Legends from Camp, where loss of home becomes inextricably linked to a problematic identity and a negative self-concept.

In 1996, Inada again acknowledged his debt to California’s Great Central Valley region by contributing two previously unpublished poems, “Elementary Spanish” and “Trombpoem,” for Stan Yogi’s Highway 99: A Literary Journey Through California’s Great Central Valley, continuing his long practice of choosing a variety of
outlets for his prolific work. Between 1970 and 2002, Inada's poetry appeared in no less than nine major literary anthologies, including David Kherdian's *Settling America* (1974); William Stafford's *Modern Poetry of the American West* (1975); Philip J. McFarland's *Focus on Forms* (1977); Joe Bruchac's American Book Award-winning *Breaking Silence: An Anthology of Contemporary Asian American Poets* (1983); Nathaniel Mackey's *Moment's Notice: Jazz in Poetry and Prose* (1993); and Martha Ronk and Paul Vangelisti's *Place as Purpose: Poetry from the Western States* (2002). These anthologies place Inada's work in an array of different contexts, making him a difficult poet to pigeonhole. All represent the diversity of his poetic vision, his openness to public reception, and his growing importance to minority writing and to western American literature.

**INADA AS COMMUNITY POET: LEGENDS FROM CAMP**

In 1992, Lawson Inada finally reemerged with his second full-length book of poetry, *Legends from Camp*, which was published by Coffee House Press at the behest of Frank Chin and Mort Marcus (Inada, Letter). In the twenty-one years that had elapsed since the appearance of *Before the War*, Inada had been

"all over the map" with various activities: teaching new "minority"/"ethnic" courses, initiating and even administrating a program for "disadvantaged" (including white) students, while also writing/presenting papers [. . . and being] custodian/shipping clerk/delivery man/editor/executive for Kids Matter, Inc., a children's media and publishing company. (Letter)

Aided by these experiences, a more sophisticated yet complacent poet now appears. With an overwhelming backlog of material, Inada published approximately fifty poems in *Legends from Camp.*
The 177-page book was a huge effort by conventional poetry standards, and it eventually won an American Book Award for the poet's sensitive handling of provocative autobiographical material. In book reviewer R. C. Doyle's words, Inada represents "not only himself but all of those victimized but silent Japanese Americans who endured needless, demeaning, and illegal incarceration in America's internment camps" (1465), showing the deep psychological scars that continue to linger years later.

Adhering to the New Historical approach employed in The Big Aiiieeeee!, Inada splits these narrative poems into five separate sections—"Camp," "Fresno," "Jazz," "Oregon," and "Performance"—each introduced with a photograph and a brief personal essay that sets the section into an appropriate historical and interpretive context. The poems collected here follow Inada's life from his childhood in camp to his success as a professional, "community" poet (Legends 148). This chronological approach allows readers to chart Inada's development as a person and an artist. Reading Legends from Camp back-to-back with Before the War causes a much more jarring view of Inada's life, however, showing how much his work has changed in style, technique, and attitude in his growth from a young contentious poet to a worldly elder statesman. Both volumes cover similar autobiographical ground.

After a brief preface and a formal introduction, Inada opens Legends from Camp's first section, simply entitled "Camp," with an imagined conversation between himself and President Franklin Roosevelt. Here, the poet questions the legitimacy of internment and its inadequate historical representation, and he attempts to lend a human voice to the experience. He follows this brief prose section with an historical document, a copy of the evacuation notice ordering all persons of Japanese ancestry on the west coast to report to specified Assembly Centers. Subsequently, Inada uses this section's poems to de-center fixed historical notions,
personalizing the camp experience for readers by depicting the harrowing life of those interned.

The theme of this section appears explicitly in part nineteen of the long poem “Legends from Camp”: “It was tough enough deciphering / what was going on right here” (21). To combat the new, disorienting world in which they were unwillingly placed, internees, adults and children alike, reverted to mythmaking, creating order for the unintelligible and explanations for the unexplainable, preserving their culture and collective consciousness within a long oral tradition. By the time of Inada’s writing, however, these mythic stories had moved into the realm of legend, becoming unverifiable tales about the members and happenings of each camp community. In the book, Inada “uses ‘legend’ in two distinct but related ways. Not only does he include oral / aural local, regional, or even national folk histories, but he doubles the meaning to outline and map the topography of the internment camp’s human landscape” (Doyle 1465). The five poems that make up the “Camp” section, as well as many other poems in the book, show Inada as bard (Varon 86), giving voice to a communal experience that otherwise would be lost forever, lying outside of conventional history but remaining permanent in personal memory.

Inada intentionally juxtaposes the volume’s first poem, “Instructions to All Persons,” with a copy of Lieutenant General J. L. DeWitt’s evacuation notice that dictated the material items internees could bring with them: bedding, toilet articles, clothes, kitchenware, and a few personal effects (Legends 4). In his poem, Inada shows what else Japanese-Americans brought with them to camp—ancestry, family, tradition, respect, and civility—all of which allowed them to make it through the experience with collective strength. The poem can also be read as giving instructions to the reader. “Let us take / what we can / for the occasion,” prepares us for the confessional, “ahistorical” nature of the short poems that
follow, which Inada vows to present with order, balance, and fairness (5-6), a covenant he never breaks.

With the next extended poem, "Legends from Camp," Inada questions the ability of "history" to paint an accurate picture of camp life. The poem's prologue begins with historical facts that show the inadequacy of objective representation: "10 camps, 7 states / 120,113 residents. // Still, figures can lie [. . .]" (7). Through Whitmanesque cataloguing, which the reader immediately associates with democracy and inclusiveness, Inada lists the rank and file that history often excludes, the carpenters, electricians, and sewage engineers who helped the camps run smoothly as well as the aunts, uncles, mothers, and fathers who aided the war effort stateside (7-8). All of these missing details cause the poet to question the truthfulness of historical depiction by prologue's end:

[. . .] the event, the experience, the history
slowly began to lose its memory,
gradually drifting into a kind of fiction—
a "true story based on fact,"
but nevertheless with "all the elements of fiction" [. . .] (8)

The twenty-five vignettes that follow the prologue attempt to resurrect the oral stories that historical literacy has destroyed, presenting the myths and legends that undercut our notions of what constitutes "history" while simultaneously adding a subjective human dimension to it.

For Inada, myth, legend, and poetry hold as much truth as any objective discipline, which the multi-sectioned "Legends from Camp" aptly illustrates. Section four, "The Legend of Lost Boy," recounts the story of a youngster who, "so stripped of identity in the once familiar surroundings of the local fairground turned internment camp, loses his way only to be 'found' in a chilling literal sense of that word" (Varon 85). This poem is about a person's loss
of both individual and national identity when he is treated as an enemy alien in his home country. In discussing “The Legend of Lost Boy,” Inada has said it is about the way we sometimes “get lost and confused in our lives” (Wixon and Markee). It also reflects the troubling feelings Inada must deal with on a daily basis: “it took a lot of years after I got out of camp to come to terms with what we were doing there, why we were there, and what was really going on” (Wixon and Markee), issues that question the truthfulness of American rhetoric.

Another section important to Inada’s mythic theme is “The Legend of Home.” Here, Inada depicts how each interned child’s native city was transformed into something vastly different in his or her imagination, even though most came from small California towns like Fresno, Placerville, Watsonville, or Lodi (Legends 21). In thinking about Amache camp, Inada remembers children “talking about their fabulous places . . . the funny thing, of course, is that I’ve been to these fabulous places that you drive right through or wouldn’t think twice about, but, boy, when you’re in a place like camp, they loom large in your memory” (Wixon and Markee). While they were forcibly held in camp, their conception of “home” changed entirely. “Home” became mythic to these children either because they literally couldn’t remember home, they misremembered things about it, or because home no longer existed for them as a tangible idea in the face of such a harsh reality. Oddly enough, after being released from camp, many young internees identified themselves by the camp they were imprisoned in, another type of “home.” To Inada, the ten camps that were spread across the country still exist in memory “like a jagged scar” on the face of America, “a twisted and remembered fence” that will never allow internees to forget (Legends 28).

The other short poems that make up “Legends from Camp” work in this quasi-historical, mythic way as well. Some poems, such as
“The Legend of Flying Boy,” “The Legend of the Hakujin Woman,” and “The Legend of Groucho,” create epic figures out of ordinary personages while “The Legend of the Great Escape,” “The Legend of the Jerome Smokestack,” and “The Legend of the Block 6G Obake” show the extent to which Japanese-Americans are tied to the American landscape and are now appropriating its sites for their own use. Although the nation’s mountains, plains, and swamps were once sites of Japanese-American passivity and embarrassment, many internees, including Inada, have begun raising their voices to claim an integral part in America’s troubled history. More than anything, the vignettes and short poems that make up the long poem “Legends from Camp” reveal the extraordinary experience of internment and the uniqueness of Japanese-American culture, adding an alternative set of myths and legends to the existing stories of the American west.

“Fresno,” Legend from Camp’s second section, is also peppered with nostalgic stories. Here, Inada adds a human element to cultural geography by recounting his childhood memories of the people and places that made up his hometown after the war, answering his own impossible question, “What is the meaning of Fresno?” (Legends 33). He uses such community figures as his Hispanic childhood friend, Charles Gomez; his conservative, white music teacher, Miss Gordon; and his inquisitive, black classmate, Rayford Butler to supplement such a vague geographic description as “Fresno, California’s eighth largest city, is the financial headquarters of the San Joaquin Valley agribusiness” (qtd. in 33). This quote, which serves as an epigraph to the entire section, in no way describes the vitality of the city or the cultural diversity of its West Side. Only mythic stories about everyday people do that.

In “Finding the Center,” Inada intentionally echoes William Butler Yeats and Chinua Achebe to show the hegemonic power of geographic appropriation. Even though the poet knew as a child
that the Gomez family’s backyard, with its mounds of dirt, growing vegetables, and colorful orange trees, was an important, magical place, it only finds public legitimacy through proclamation. A plaque, placed in the backyard by the state government, reads with centered letters:

“You’re standing on it:
This dirt
Is the exact
Geographical
Center
Of the state
Of
California!”
(42)

Only a civil declaration this absurd could move a poor minority family into statewide prominence. Ironically, even though the Gomez family is literally in the center of the state, they, like other Hispanics and citizens of Fresno’s West Side, will continue to be marginalized through institutional apparatuses and prevailing ideologies that operate against them.

Similarly, “Rayford’s Song” deals with the hegemonic power of white culture in the elementary school classroom. In the poem, Rayford Butler, a poor African-American, asks Miss Gordon, an elderly, white music teacher, to sing one of his “own” songs. Bored by “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” and “Oh! Susannah,” conventional songs of cultural indoctrination, Rayford solos a cappella, singing the hymn “Swing Low Sweet Chariot” in his own black dialect:

“Suh-whing ah-looow,
suh-wheet ah-charr-eee-oohh
ah-comin’ for to carr-eee
meee ah-hooooome . . .” (44)
Miss Gordon, however, appropriates the song by criticizing Rayford’s pronunciation of the word “chariot,” replacing it with Standard English. As Inada remembers, this act silenced the other children in class, all of whom had songs “on tips of tongues, but stuck / in throats” (45). By poem’s end, Miss Gordon further consolidates her power by calling for “Old Black Joe,” a derogatory minstrel tune that puts Rayford in his place, after he has failed to establish a vital subculture within class.

To show the importance of black music to American culture, however, Inada uses “Jazz,” the third section of *Legends from Camp*, to pay homage to the major jazz artists of the mid-twentieth century: trumpeter Louis Armstrong, singer Billie Holiday, pianist Bud Powell, and saxophonists Lester Young, Charlie Parker, and John Coltrane, among others. The poems in this section also show these artists’ lasting influence on Inada’s life’s work, with jazz music growing from a type of “lingua franca” on Fresno’s West Side to a full-fledged, multi-disciplined aesthetic for Inada as professional poet (57). As he notes in a 1982 interview,

I’m not a “frustrated musician” but a literary one, which fits right in with poetry/music—the 4/4 time of the iambic, for instance, or the waltzing anapest, and all the singing and swinging involved—and I know a lot of musicians who want to play the typewriter. So what I’ve done, in my own way, is to make those guys my peers, my colleagues, my “competition,” and whenever I hit the stage or page, I always keep an eye on the door [. . .] (Salisbury 71)

This “competition” is never more evident than in the eleven poems that make up *Legends from Camp’s* “Jazz” section, where Inada examines the connection between music and poetry through the interrelatedness of sound and technique. Here, he duels with the performers he writes about in moments of textual dialogue. In
“‘Blue Monk’ (Linear)” Inada uses caesuras to establish a syncopated beat as well as anaphora and rhyme to echo the musical phrasings of a Thelonius Monk tune; in “‘Blue Monk’ (Percussive)” he incorporates alliteration to mimic staccato effects in a concrete poem shaped like a drum; in “Listening Images” he provides a series of epigrams about various musicians that act as an overture to the longer poems that follow; in “Marion Brown” he employs homophones to mirror the saxophonist’s experimental modal phrasings; and in “The Theme” he includes stanzas with little or no punctuation that mimic measures that call for stagger breathing. Although he uses them for especial intent here, all are hallmark techniques of Inada’s verse, a jazz aesthetic he continually relies upon.

Beginning with “Rayford’s Song,” these and other poems in the section reflect the democratic philosophy of both jazz and American poetry, an appealing idea for a poet whose “jazz poetics is a site of cross-racial identification that enables us to think beyond the centering of whiteness that the binary of colored versus white produces” (Chang 153). Walt Whitman’s early call for “democratic vistas” fits comfortably with the hybrid musical tradition that Louis Armstrong likened to a well-seasoned stew. John Coltrane’s use of Indian, African, and Asian chord structures; Dizzy Gillespie’s continual exploration of Caribbean rhythms; and Miles Davis’s multi-genre, fusion experiments make sense to an Asian-American poet who uses African-American music to push the boundaries of American poetry, making poetry an experimental medium that accurately reflects its multicultural influences. Jazz and verse are a natural combination for a poet who wishes to further America’s acceptance of its myriad artistic traditions.

In “Oregon,” the fourth and longest section in Legends from Camp, Inada questions traditional notions of place. In “Appreciating Oregon,” Inada claims that “to appreciate what
Oregon has, and is, / you have to imagine that Oregon doesn't exist" (Legends 96). In other words, one must throw off preconceived notions for the seeds of fresh ideas to bloom. He does this in "My Father and Myself Facing the Sun" by using different parts of the Oregon landscape as metaphors to signify his father and himself: the flat grasslands depict Fuzzy Inada while the rough, hidden crags denote Lawson (99). Each has become a part of the land he inhabits just as the land has become a part of him.

Inada restructures the meaning of landscape in the long poem "At the Stronghold" where he fuses geography, ancestry, and legend to show how people and events continue to haunt landscape and memory, revealing the layers of historical residue that help to (re)figure a place. Here, Inada establishes an historical connection between Native Americans and Japanese-Americans, both of whom were forcibly removed from their homes by the American government. Inada sets much of the poem at Tule Lake, California, the site of the 1872-73 Modoc Indian War led by Chief Kientpoos, also known as Captain Jack, who fought the U.S. Army to prevent forced removal to Oklahoma. Sixty years later, this land, situated on the California-Oregon border, served as the Tule Lake internment camp (Wixon and Markee). In the poem, Inada yearns to be like Captain Jack, a man who fought against indignities for the preservation of his family, his culture, and his people. He too needs his "[.. .] own / Sense / Shaped into place" (Legends 104). Instead of picking up arms, however, Inada picks up his pen. The harshly cut monosyllabic lines that open the poem gradually transform into longer, more sophisticated ones that symbolize Inada's successful fusion of cultures into appropriate poetic material. Both allow him to recapture his culture and to establish a tradition for future generations of Japanese-American citizens, Inada's prevailing concern as a poet.

In no way is this concern more evident than in "Performance," the last section of Legends from Camp. "Poems in Stone" compiles
a series of haiku-like verses that Inada composed, collected, and arranged for inscription on stone monoliths at the Japanese American Historical Plaza located in Portland, Oregon’s Tom McCall Waterfront Park. Working with landscape architect Robert Murase, Inada wanted the stones to chronicle the plight of Japanese-Americans through time, being read by visitors as they walk through the plaza along the Willamette River, moving from immigration and internment to retribution and ancestry (148, 151-53). The stones call for personal meditation about the horrid experiences of Japanese-Americans, allowing the ghosts of America’s troubled past to confront visitors as they stop at each station.

While the other poems in the “Performance” section are meant for oral performance rather than silent reading, they also illustrate Inada’s ever-growing role as a socially conscious community poet. As Inada informs us in the section’s preface, he wrote “Akatonbo Song” with Fresno clarinetist Miles Ishigaki to accompany a suite of Japanese folk songs for a Central California Nikkei Foundation fundraiser; he performed “Headwaters” with keyboardist John Mazzei to benefit Ashland, Oregon’s Actor’s Theater; he read “Poem for Television” to help raise money during a PBS telethon; and he composed “Something Grand” for performance on college campuses, with audience chanting as an integral part of the experience (149). This emulation of poetry’s original bardic tradition has “granted” Inada a “functional, responsible role in society” (148), his raison d’être, an honored place contemporary poets rarely achieve. It also explains his twenty-one-year lapse between full-length poetry books.

Unlike many writers, Inada views public readings as a legitimate form of publication, each a one-time, unique experience for listeners. A public reading calls for improvisation and audience participation, defying the “fixed” notion of poetry by allowing for continual revision and change. Inada’s years of public performance
Five years after *Legends from Camp*, Inada published his next book of poetry, *Drawing the Line* (1997). In many ways this volume acts as a companion to the earlier book, revisiting autobiographical material, solidifying familiar themes, and employing a similar five-part structure. In this book, however, Inada is more concerned with the transformational nature of language, showing the linguistic relationship between words and parts of speech as well as their mimetic ability to depict Inada's transformation into the person he is today. In this way, most of the poems in *Drawing the Line* are metapoetic. Inada traces his development as an individual through poetry that calls attention to its own fluidity, adaptability, and reflexivity to show that language determines us as much as we determine it.

"This One, That One" is nothing more than a series of epigrams that begin with the demonstrative pronoun "this" or "that," each of which lacks an antecedent to act as interpretive signpost. Here, readers must figure out the missing nouns that allow them to place the epigrams into an appropriate context, a problem reflecting the process through which readers construct poetic meaning. "Over Here, Over There" works in much the same way. In this

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poem, the adverbs "here" and "there" also lack obvious referents. Inada intentionally de-centers readers, making them reconcile the dominant binaries he deconstructs: East/West, Asia/America, home/foreignness, past/present, and tradition/innovation. By subtly leaving out enough information to allow readers to make their own connections, Inada helps them subvert the ideology of binary thinking they unknowingly embrace. He intentionally places them in a disorienting position to experience the discomfort of minority life. They can't help but think outside of their traditional notions.

In "Pursuing a Career," Inada even calls his own poetic vocation into question, playing on the multiple meanings of "plumbing" in the poem's third part, "My License":

Way, way back, when I was still considering careers, the factory foreman told me he was attending night school because "being a plumber in New York City is like having a license to print money."

I'm sure Lenny's doing just that now, whereas here I am in the boonies, plumbing the depths for minimal currency with my license to print poetry. (90)

Even though Inada also "plumbs" depths as disturbing as those of a conventional "plumber," society values a "plumber's" practical work more than a poet's aesthetic one. Inada's "license to print poetry," although sanctioned with an advanced M.F.A. degree, is worthless in monetary terms when compared to the license that a plumber figuratively prints for himself. In "Shouldering
Responsibility,” the poem’s fourth part, it is no surprise to Inada, then, that no one recognizes him after he cruises over to Phoenix, Oregon, “just to get a feel / of what the impact of my work might be” (91). Even though “verse” is a base word of “conversant,” no one at the local beauty shop, gas station, or convenience store wants to talk about or read poetry. They could care less that Inada rhymes “haiku” with “Kwik Lube”; they con“verse” about other things. Poking fun at himself in the self-deprecatory style of Toshio Mori, Inada justifies their silence by thinking that the town members may be too embarrassed to talk to him or too awed by his presence for conversation.

Inada’s marginalized place as a poet may explain his decision, declared in “Kicking the Habit,” to stop using English one evening. Although he makes his living with the language, as he admits, it sometimes restricts expression, having made him an “Angloholic” (49). Instead, he clears his mind and sits silently outdoors to learn the language of insects and animals. They allow him to create onomatopoeic neologisms—“Shhhhhlllyyymmmm”—and to further his understanding of the need for living things to communicate (48). By listening to nature, he realizes the linguistic possibilities of all sounds, a process that stretches his imagination as a poet. He realizes the infinite number of phonemes, or meaningful units of sound, and their extensive allusive ability, causing him to experiment with them throughout the book.

The associative power of words becomes clear in “Denver Union Station.” In this poem, Inada recounts his family’s train trip from Amache Camp to their home in Fresno after the war. Later, during Inada’s postwar childhood, his grandfather asks him repeatedly to imitate the conductor’s call: “Denver Union Station! / Denver Union Station! / Denver Union Station!— / Everybody off!” (40). Although he didn’t understand it at the time, Inada later realized that his chant “was like a song of freedom . . . that’s why it
was so meaningful to him. It meant, ‘hey, now you can go and live your own life’” (Wixon and Markee). Even though his grandfather spoke little English, those five words always brought a smile to his face, signifying freedom.

The confrontational title of Inada’s third full-length book in no way portrays its array of playful poems. Throughout, he virtually runs the gamut of poetic forms—epigrams and haikus as well as concrete, lyric, and narrative poems—along with a wide variety of poetic techniques: anaphora, oxymorons, puns, neologisms, chants, rhymes, alliteration, catalogues, homophones, and cultural allusions. Even though the volume’s last poem “Drawing the Line” recounts the plight of Japanese-Americans who resisted the draft during World War II, Inada never affronts his reader in the way draft-dodgers affronted their fellow citizens, by drawing lines between the reader and himself. With this book, Inada firmly cements his position as a people’s poet. Although Drawing the Line is less cohesive and ambitious than Legends from Camp, it presents stylistically intricate yet accessible poems that rarely overwhelm the reader. Even though reviewer Malcolm Gay believes Inada’s emphasis on performance makes his verse lose “something of the [its] impact from public to private readings” (15), it is this same concern for audience that makes Drawing the Line so enjoyable. Unlike many of his colleagues, Inada aspires to democracy, not to elitism. He draws a line against ethereal snobbery, favoring an aesthetic that supports his themes of enlightenment and acceptance.

**POET, TEACHER, LEADER:**

**LAWSON INADA AS A WESTERN AMERICAN WRITER**

Lawson Fusao Inada has never liked labels. When asked about being considered as a “western” American writer, he was unusually silent, saying only two words in response: “that’s fine”
Rather than limiting himself as a regional or minority poet, he prefers viewing himself as fitting into what he calls "the grand tradition [...] the world-wide scope of things" (Salisbury, "Dialogue" 63). Even though Inada made this statement more than twenty years ago, it is more than relevant today in the face of the current globalization of literary studies called for by critics such as Stephen Greenblatt and his like-minded colleagues at the Modern Language Association.

Much can be gained, however, by viewing Inada within this regional context. More than anything, Inada's poetry and scholarship force us to rethink what it means to be both a westerner and an American, challenging conservative notions. Even though the first Japanese-Americans began immigrating to the west coast of the U.S. in the 1880s, there is much denial concerning their cultural and economic influence on the region. This is especially true in literary scholarship. Despite James H. Maguire's recent assertion that "the Western Literature Association has [...] tried to escape the fallacies of exceptionalism by including the views of some American Indians, Hispanics, and Asian Americans" (382), fewer than five articles on Asian-American writing have appeared in the journal Western American Literature in the past ten years. Emphasis should be placed on the word "some" in Maguire's quote, which aptly expresses the hegemonic tendencies of western American scholarship to remain predominantly "white." Similar to Western American Literature, Boise State University's Western Writers Series, of which this study is a part, has published only three booklets on Asian-American writers in its thirty-year history. Out of 160 publications, only booklets on David Henry Hwang, Garret Hongo, and Frank Chin represent western America's Asian community. A similar dismissal has occurred in the recently commissioned Updating the Literary West (1997), which provides a chapter on Maxine Hong Kingston, a safe bet, and a few brief nods
to other such token writers throughout the 1,000-page volume. Its lack of Asian-Americans shows that *Updating the Literary West* is not very “updated” at all in terms of racial inclusion.

Today, approximately 4,100,000 Asian-Americans populate California, Oregon, and Washington alone. More than any other Asian-American poet or scholar, Lawson Inada gives voice to the stories of immigration, the difficulty of assimilation, and the troubling attempts to create a “home” in a hostile, foreign environment. His depiction of life in the internment camps, all ten of which were located west of the Mississippi River, and his attempt to resurrect the forgotten narratives of his Japanese-American forerunners make us rethink western American history, American rhetoric, and the stereotype of the rugged and “free” western individual. His inventive use of jazz and his black, Hispanic, and Native American characters remind us that most west-coast communities are multicultural places; to him, America is a “potlatch we are all attending” (Salisbury 72). As his poetry and scholarship show, all is not and has never been as it seems.

During his forty-year career, Lawson Inada has been selfless in his devotion to teaching literature, writing poetry, and participating in community service. He has been a member of the Committee on Racism and Bias in the Teaching of English; he has sat on the board of directors for Southern Oregon Public Broadcasting; and he has read in area high schools as a part of Oregon’s and Minnesota’s Poetry-in-the-Schools program. Even though he is now semi-retired, he hopes to conduct a reading tour of small Appalachian colleges in late 2003, appearing as an “ambassador” on behalf of minority writers of the American west (Holliday, Personal Interview). Few writers or poets have given as much back to their community. For all of these reasons, his importance to western writing and his influence on American literature are inestimable. The same is true of his poetry as he once wrote of
the work of both Toshio Mori and John Okada: "[T]his literature, by its very nature—its range, its direction, its humaneness—embodies the soul and spirit of America" (Inada, "Of Place" 264). Nothing is more true of the life and work of Lawson Fusao Inada.
Selected Bibliography

SELECTED WORKS BY LAWSON FUSAO INADA

BOOKS

WORKS EDITED AND INTRODUCED BY INADA


MISCELLANEOUS POETRY


MISCELLANEOUS PROSE AND CRITICISM


INTERVIEWS AND PERSONAL CORRESPONDENCE


STUDIES OF LAWSON FUSAO INADA

ARTICLES AND REVIEWS

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