

Check This Box

By Merrily McCarthy

FADE IN

EXT: MIDDLE OF INTERSECTION SURROUNDED BY STREAMS OF PEOPLE - MIDDLE OF THE AFTERNOON.

Stew , mid 40's, wearing homeless get-up, bedraggled beard is twirling in middle of people and talking to his friend Lue, a neatly dressed Amer/Hmong . They are walking and talking.

STEW

Look at me! Do you know what I am?

LUE

Huh? What do you mean?

STEW

Do you know what I am?

LUE

What the tarnation are you talking about?

Stew poses and prances.

STEW

What do I look like to you?

LUE

Look Like? You look like a guy. A dude. My friend.

STEW

No. No! That is not what I am talking about! My ethnicity man. My background. My country!

LUE

Oh That!

STEW

Yeh that. My country. Who am I?

LUE

Gees, you want me to look that hard?

STEW

That's what I'm asking!

LUE

I dunno. I never thought about it.

STEW

Well why not? You take me for granted?

Well no but... LUE

But what - we live here. STEW

The pair have walked across the intersection and up the crowded street in this non stop verbal exchange. They now have reached an old apartment building and are standing in front of it, still talking.

Look man, what's this all about? I didn't start this, you did! LUE

I'm just bugged. STEW

Bugged about what? LUE

Applications! STEW

LUE cracks up laughing

All this is about applications? LUE

Yeah! Applications. STEW

Applications to what, man? LUE

Work! STEW

Work? You got to be kidding me. LUE

Yeah. Work. STEW

Alright. What's up? LUE

Now they are standing in front of a Post Office. A long line reaches down the street. It is filled with ethnic appearing people. Mexicans, Blacks, and Asians and a sparse sprinkle of white women. They all have small children in tow and the children are pulling and screeching and reaching. The two men talk to each other ignoring the background.

Well, I have been filling out applications. STEW

And? LUE

STEW

And, I found out I do not know who or what I am!

LUE

Goosh man! Explain your self!

Stew is grabbing his head and pulling at his hair.

STEW

What I am. What I am. You know, all these years...all these years, I have always assumed...

LUE

Assumed What? What is your problem?

STEW

Look. I'm having a real hard time right now. Even telling you this.

LUE

Geez, what it is man?

Stew, perplexed strokes his chin.

STEW

You are not going to believe me, so I got to tell you right. How can I do this?

LUE

You calling me stupid?

STEW

No, no, not that!

LUE

What then?

STEW

How long have you been filling out applications?

LUE

What!? Are you kidding?

STEW

No, how long?

LUE

Years. All my life.

STEW

Exactly. You know what, so have I.

LUE

So.

STEW

I think we have been missing something!

LUE

What would that be?

STEW

On the applications.

LUE

What on the applications?

STEW

This is very scary. All these years. And I didn't even realize it!

LUE

Is this a private conversation you are having?

STEW

No. I will tell you. But you might not want to know.

LUE

You think I will freak? The suspense is killing me.

STEW

Maybe. Look...

SONG: APPS AND FORMS

We all have apps and forms
Apps and forms
Apps and forms
We all have apps and forms
We keep them in our dorms
We fill them out during storms
They are for school
They are for work
They are for play
We fill them out
Then we pray
Please, please don't
Throw our apps and forms away

Impatiently Lue drums table or a surface.

LUE

I'm waiting. And this better be good!

Stew takes a deep breath and begins.

STEW

You my friend, are not an American.

Lue laughs and laughs more.

LUE

What? What are you talking about. Of course I am an American and so are you. You are more American than me. You got a beard and look homeless!

STEW

No you are not American, and I can prove it. We don't even have a country. We aren't even a race. We have no culture. We have been fooled by the writers of forms and applications.

Now, the two talking and walking men are in front of Kinkos, and Kinkos is next to the hall of justice, and the hall of justice is next to the Police Department, and that is next to another Kinkos that is next to a small family owned StarBucks. The walking and talking and posing and gesturing continue. The dialogue gets more heated and intense.

LUE

Now I am intrigued. How can what you say be true?

STEW

Somewhere, over the last few decades we have over time lost our heritage. Lost our country! And right under our noses.

LUE

How?

STEW

Let's look at this. A few decades ago millions of people came here from other countries. And still come here from other countries.

LUE

Go on...

STEW

Once on shore we were welcomed to a land we learned had the name America. But since we just got here, we were not called Americans, we were labeled foreigners.

LUE

Yeah...

STEW

We were called British, or Scottish, or Irish, or Spanish, or Italian, or Russian or German or Arabic or whatever. Maybe even Portuguese! That is all we ever heard!

LUE

Sorta. But that is not all we were called.

STEW

Yeah, if we lived on the other side of the tracks in the ghetto, they threw names at us, like chink, spic, chicano, Mexican-monkey, the negrows, portagees, wasp,. We were named and labeled alright! But do you see my point! On top of that we were told to "go back where

we came from.” But they didn’t mean a street or a town, they meant “country!”

LUE

Sure. If you move here to live, even your next door neighbor thinks of you as being from someplace else, but not from here. We are never from here.

STEW

That is it. We always get questioned, “where are you from?” So we begin to think, duh, if they are asking me where I am from, I must be from some other place, but not here. This creates an automatic mental note. A displacement if you will, from where our bodies are at. So we are thinking, “I thought I lived here”, but wait a minute, I guess not. I had better make someplace up and it can’t be a city or state. What are they asking me for? Oh, that is right! They don’t realize I am here yet.

LUE

But , maybe it is not a city, state or even a country. Oh, I get it. You are thinking of a cultural background, , oops, race aren’t you?

STEW

Now you get part of it. Closer anyway. If you look strange or different, they think , “he can’t be from here...so he’s gotta be from there, or somewhere other than here!” And from what substance does he come from?

LUE

I know you. You live here. You are an American!

STEW

Ah ha. So you say!

LUE

You have a birth certificate.

STEW

True!. But it is confusing isn’t it. Yet the reality is, we have been being mentally displaced for decades and subtly lead to believe we are not really here. We are always someplace else or of some other origin. Except for the Indians! We have been lead to believe we are not even citizens in our own country...the country we where too, have been born and raised.

LUE

It is the mystery of origin. How can they do that and get away with it?

STEW

Them? It is not just them. It is all of us doing it together. It is how we think. Maybe even how we are trained to think in school. Maybe that is part of them, but still. We all are responsible. It is also how we ask the question: Where are you from? And what we mean when we give the answer!

LUE

I get it. It started and we didn’t stop it.

STEW

Suppose....or maybe just think it through.

The two men are now paused and gawking at the City Hall which is next door to a huge International Food Market Place. Cars, Carts and Shoppers are buzzing past, in and out, in and out.

LUE

Not my country! That is a trip. I was born here. But I am still not from here. I look Asian, so people ask me "where are you from"...they say ,you know, " what country?" I should be considered an American because I too was born here. But they don't ask me like that, they want to know, why do my eyes slant, why am I small, why am I Chinese. And why don't I go back to where I came from. But I do not know anywhere else either!

STEW

That's not all.

LUE

There's more?

STEW

Sure. Lot's more. Forms.

LUE

What?

STEW

Forms. Applications.

SONG: APPS AND FORMS

We all have apps and forms
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They are for school
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We fill them out
Then we pray
Please, please don't
Throw our apps and forms away

The two men are now walking past the Unemployment Office of the Counties. People are lined up. Minimum wage earners, dressed in an attempt to impress. They have used their limited dollars to do this so they look incongruent. Tow trucks are in the parking lot taking cars to the impound lots and the Police are scribbling tickets in the background. The two men are in dialogue.

LUE

What's wrong with those now?

STEW

Well, locked up in the Form and Application vault in Washington DC is the original form and application that started it all. It contains the formula for the disappearance of our race, culture and country. It is the model or map everyone today uses to seek out and destroy race, culture and country. Some bearded old dude sits at a giant oak desk, quill in hand writing forms for us to fill out. It is the same formula and form we all use and have used for decades. It has not changed.

LUE

Why would he do that?

STEW

He was commanded to do it.

LUE

What did he do?

STEW

He created a governor through the writing of forms and applications. A secret system to control the people and direct their reproductive and economic activities. He wrote the first form that messed it all up. Or the form that took the advantage away from the people. They all thought he was doing them a service. But that is not what was up.

LUE

What do you mean?

STEW

It's the other part of the confusion. Or confusion fusion!

LUE

And that would be?

STEW

It's on a box or inked on a line. It is part of every form and application in existence.

LUE

How can something so meaningless, create so much damage?

STEW

It is written on every dollar we use, "In God We Trust." We are required to close our eyes and not think. We are told to follow the instructions and just do, and follow some more, and fill out the lines and answer the questions. We are not supposed to question our destination. We are simply instructed to go along with the program. Now it has become over time, the retroactive effect of exponential expansion of the effects of 250 million people repeatedly filling out these ridiculous mundane forms. The employers already have all the answers. Give them one number and they can learn whatever they want to know about a person.

LUE

What number is that?

STEW

Your Social Security number.

LUE

Are you serious? You mean that number tells it all and over time the problem just gets huge!?

STEW

Yeah. Big Time. Like on the forms.

They are now walking inside a very busy shopping mall or complex or inside a printing facility. Behind them is lots of activity and lots of reproduction and commotion.

LUE

Forms? What's up with them?

STEW

They get passed around a lot. The information gets shared. Forms and applications are like a disease. They repeat the same questions. They repeat the same disease. Over time everybody gets infected. But no one knows they got a disease, because it is a mental disease. It's who we are. We have become a social problem. And no one knows where it came from. So they can not cure it. At least, not right away.

LUE

You mean like your name, address and social security number?

STEW

No. Well yes, and more. The forms and applications that contain questions about race.

LUE

Like who runs the fastest?

STEW

No. Like "what country are you from". Buckle up my friend. We are going for a drive.

LUE

Where we going?

STEW

Inside your head! My head! And the heads of our, uh countrymen.

LUE

Oh, I want to go. Take me there. Tell me about the forms and applications.

STEW

Haven't you ever noticed it?

LUE

Noticed what?

STEW

What they are doing! With the forms. On the forms!

LUE

I guess. I don't pay as much attention to those details as you have.
What are they doing?

STEW

Have you ever paid attention to the little box?

LUE

There have been lots of boxes in my life. Which ones are you talking about?

STEW

The box that asks questions about your race. On forms and apps.

LUE

I don't race.

STEW

That is what I mean. You don't race!

LUE

You mean about my country of origin?

STEW

Finally! That is the correct question.

LUE

What about it?

STEW

Don't you ever have thoughts about it?

LUE

No, no thoughts. I fill it out.

SONG: CHECK THIS BOX

Check this box
Check this box
That is what they said
Check with pencil or ink
With speed, don't blink
Just check don't think
What it says
Is totally right
It can't be changed
At least tonight
Check This Box
They want to know
Where you are from
And where you go
Is America

Your country or not
Just check this box.

Stew and Lue are seated at the dining table of the facility. Other employees are eating food in the background and serving themselves and moving around. Stew and Lue are engrossed in their conversation with each other.

STEW

That is what I mean. You fill it out and don't think about it?

LUE

Why should I think about it?

STEW

You should !

LUE

Why? I check the box and I don't think .

STEW

Why don't you think about what you are checking?

LUE

I'm in a hurry. I check the box and I go on.

STEW

Then you forget about it?

LUE

Yeah. I check the box and then forget about it.

STEW

How can you do that?

LUE

With my pencil. My pencil is usually sharp. Sometimes I use my pen.
I check the box with these tools.

STEW

No not that! Not think about it?

LUE

It's easy. I just don't think!

STEW

I do! I think about it.

LUE

I don't, so get on with explaining the thinking part.

STEW

What am I thinking about?

LUE

Yeah. What is so important about those little culture boxes.

STEW

AH ha! Now you said it!

LUE

What? What did I say?

STEW

Culture. What is a culture?

LUE

My country? My background of origin?

STEW

Well it could be that. But considering what the word culture means in science...

LUE

OH! Now it is science!

STEW

Sure that is what it is. That is what it is all about. The science is culture. A culture is what scientist make in a dish. Forms do the same things, only they put our culture, or “ we the people“, in the box.

LUE

You have got to be kidding me!

STEW

We are kids.

LUE

What about the box?

STEW

We are kids in a box. There used to be a book about 50 years ago, it was called The Boxcar Kids. Ever hear of it?

LUE

No. I'm Chinese, I was not around 50 years ago. I don't read American books. Anyway, what about these kids?

STEW

The kids, us, we all play in the box. The box on the forms and apps. We make choices in the box. We get all mixed up in these boxes. The boxes are on every form and application. We are forced to fill them out. Or else we get disqualified from our own humanity.

LUE

Sometimes I skip them.

STEW and LUE are again changing scenes. They walk again on the move towards the exit door and

outside in the fresh air. They head down the road or street to locate a park and walk around a small pond with ducks and geese quarreling over bread pieces. In the background is a play area where a class of children are scooting around on equipment.

STEW
Skip?

LUE
You know. Move over. Jump over.

STEW
You don't fill it in?

LUE
No, I don't fill in the box.

STEW
You ignore it?

LUE
Yes. Ignore it!

STEW
That is even worse.

LUE
Worse? Why?

STEW
Because then you are just giving up.

LUE
I'm not giving up!

STEW
So, why don't you fill in the box?

LUE
I don't want to fill in the box.

STEW
Why?

LUE
Because.

STEW
Because why?

LUE
I don't know.

STEW
I do.

LUE
Why?

STEW
Because you don't know who you are!

LUE
I know what and who I am!

STEW
If you know what and who you are, why don't you fill out the box?

LUE
I don't see me there.

STEW
Ah Ha!

LUE
I am confused. It's the words. I don't see a word for me there.

STEW
You see. It is happening.

LUE
What is?

STEW
What is the word you are looking for?

LUE
You know. Who I am!

STEW
Who are you?

LUE
My Father was Hmong. My Mother was Thai. They were from China.
I was born here, in America.

STEW
You see. That is exactly what I mean. They were from someplace else
and you were born here.

LUE
Yes.

STEW
But, where is here?

LUE
Here, is this country, this place.

STEW
Oh. You mean here?

LUE

Yeah here.

STEW

Where is that? Fresno?

LUE

No, here.

STEW

You mean the Central Valley where farmers grow food?

LUE

No here! This country. It has a name.

STEW

Why? Can't you think of it?

LUE

No. That is not it. It's America. Uh, the United States.

STEW

Oh, that country

LUE

Yeah.

STEW

Oh! Our country.

LUE

Yes.

STEW

So, if you are born here, that would make you?

LUE

Well, technically, an American.

STEW

Technically?

LUE

Yeah! I was born here, but other persons don't recognize America as my country. To them I am not an American. They look at me and see me as Hmong or Chinese.

STEW

Did you just hear yourself?

LUE

Yes. I did. Very clearly.

STEW

This is America. You are born here, and you think you are not American, but Chinese.

LUE
Yeah. That's me!

STEW
Sounds like you are confused.

LUE
Hey. I don't fill in boxes on forms either! But I assure you, I am not confused.

STEW
You are confused.

LUE
Shut Up.

STEW
You and several million other Americans!

LUE
What do you mean?

STEW
You all do not know who you are, or where you are from.

LUE
My God. How can that be!

STEW
It is easy.

LUE
You think you are funny!

STEW
No, actually we all have been duped, very subtly and very cleverly.

LUE
How?

STEW
From questions about, "where are you from?" And boxes asking about, "our race!"

LUE
Mmmmm.

STEW and LUE are at a sporting event, a car racing event if you will. For that matter they are headed off to watch a foot race at a fund raising event afterwards. Their dialogue continues. The background is filled with activity.

STEW
What do you read when you get to a box on a form or an application?

LUE

What?

STEW

What do you see? What do you read? What does it say to you?

LUE

I see black and white ink in English, since I speak English.

STEW

Doesn't that confuse you too?

LUE

No, not really. It's just a language. My language. Our language.

STEW

So, you think?

LUE

Sure we all use it. We have too.

STEW

Oh, do we all use it?

LUE

Well, except for the Mexicans and the Asians and the Arabs.

STEW

Really? Where are they from?

LUE

From Mexico, Asia and Arabia or India maybe.

STEW

What if they are born here?

LUE

Born here?

STEW

Yeah, if they are born here? What are they then?

LUE

Mexican, Asian, Arabic, Indian, I guess.

STEW

Why doesn't anyone understand?

LEU

Understand what?

STEW

If you are born here you are an automatic citizen. You are an American, born in America. Nothing else matters.

LUE

Oh I get it. We are a country, but not a race, or a culture, unless we are

born here. And just because we are born in America, we are Americans. You are saying that is our race, or culture, if we are born here. Right!

STEW

Yes. Exactly. Well, sort of, until you read forms and applications and try to fill out the boxes.

LUE

That is when it happens!

STEW

Now you get it.

LUE

Oh wow!

STEW

See people, anybody, your boss, your government, wants you to repeatedly tell them, where you are from or what race you think you belong to, until eventually you can't hear their questions any longer, and are too old, too worn out and too tired to care.

LUE

Like overlooking the box on the form?

STEW

Exactly.

LUE

But I read and see words in the boxes.

STEW

Sure you do, we all do.

LUE

They are colours.

STEW

You figured that out did you?!

LUE

The words are usually colours. Sometimes they are this country hyphen, that country.

STEW

So now we are not people. We are colours. And we don't have a country. Because they never print American in the boxes. So we can not find the word for who we are in the box. It does not exist. We aren't even given the dignity of choosing our own country. We got to be white, black, brown or yellow colors! So it don't matter how smart we are or how big our title, they suddenly erased our country. We can be a colour or we can be a half and half. But not an American. Weird!

LUE

That is a Noble Peace Prize speech right there!

STEW

Well it is true isn't it?

LUE

Nods. Yup!

STEW

If you are an artist and you mix white with black, you get more black. If you add brown to the mixture, you get a darker shade of black and if you add yellow to the black, all you will ever get is more black. In a few more decades the box will carry one word: black. People won't need to worry about the space for country of origin, because forms and applications will be blanked out! No body home!

LUE

I'm so mad at this true lie, I want to sock someone.

STEW

You can buy a wind sock.

LUE

Yeah. If I socked someone for real, we would have trouble.

STEW

Yeah. It would be better to change the forms.

LUE

Where can we do that?

STEW

I guess find the application and form writer in Washington DC and demand to be an American on the forms and applications and in the boxes.

LUE

For reals?

STEW

Look, wouldn't you like your forms to say something besides colors or foreign countries? I want to check American. It is an insult to everyone who is a citizen and who is born here to not have a unified claim to our country, to be Americans.

LUE

I could check Native American.

STEW

Well, you would be right, depending on your interpretation of "natives."

LUE

Why? What do you mean?

STEW

Native to some people just means you are born here. But to others, it

means Indians that were living here prior to 1620. But since most of us came here and were born after that, it makes u just as much native as the Indians.

LUE

How did we get so messed up.

STEW

I think over the years the government did it to us on forms and applications and in the little boxes where our cultures are mixed. We lost our humanity. And we lost our country. And instead of embracing our country, we were not recognized as Americans. We gave up our controls to addictions. Instead of saying, he is an American, we heard, "he is an addict." Or we checked colors in boxes or drank coffee and checked "half and half" and caught the game at "half time".

LUE

Sounds like it. Misdirection and weakness!

STEW

Unless we leave!

LUE

What?

STEW

Leave. Exit. Travel.

LUE

Then what happens?

STEW

Everyone looks at us and says, "Oh, there is an American!"

LUE

Yeah. Like we have a disease or something.

STEW

Yeah, but we didn't create aids.

LUE

What?

STEW

You know, when you need help who do you turn to?

LUE

The forms and the applications and the boxes?

STEW

I would like to change the forms and applications and the words in the boxes.

LUE

I would too!

STEW

I'd like to go grab an application and fill out a box, that asks me if I am an American. Or least gives me a choice to be from my own country!

LUE

LUE

Now I understand. You are right. That is crazy now that I think about it. Our family has lived here for seven generations. We have taken it all for granted.

STEW

You see. We have too. I don't know any other country but this one. I was born here. But I never get a chance on any form or application or box to get a chance to declare my allegiance to my country of America.

LUE

It is confusing to you too?

STEW

Sure. On a form they ask me, are you white, black, brown or yellow. Or they ask me if I am white, or African/American, or Mexican/American or Asian/American or Native/American. I was born here, raised here, but for 7 generations my family has become countries and cultureless. I am a solitary singular color as a statement of my existence. I am white. What is that. It is a color. A colorless color even. It is not my country. I belong to what country: oh I am from White.

LUE

So what do you do?

STEW

I scratch it out.

LUE

That's it?

STEW

Then I write in American!

LUE

Aren't you scared they will get mad?

STEW

Maybe. Citizens need to stand up for their country. I am an American, not a "white". No wonder people get offended by name calling. For as smart as we are we are pretty dumb. Our forms and applications label us, and we get upset when we hear the word a neighbor uses to describe someone he does or does not like.

LUE

Or worse!

STEW

Can you imagine it? What if you just moved here and didn't speak any English.

LUE

They would probably wonder where all the Americans are at?
Especially if they had to fill out forms and applications and check the
boxes.

STEW

Yeah. They would be looking at those boxes and scratching their heads
every time they came to that box, and those Washington form writers
would just be laughing away, wondering if any one noticed.

LUE

God, How awful!

STEW

It really is.

LUE

You ready to go?

STEW

Go where?

LUE

To change some forms.

STEW

To add American!

LUE

Yes!

STEW

It's about time!

SONG: BORN IN AMERICA

I was born in America
I was born in America
It is my country of birth
I was born in America
It is my standard and my worth
I got my birth certificate
I got my social security number
I have lived here all my life
So why can't I claim my fame
And live a simple American life?

They two buddies walk off together into the sunset. Towards the Washington DC Capitol building. In the
background.. The music America comes up. Angel wings flutter instead of birds.

THE END

