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3rd Place Contest Entry: Sovereignty, Statehood, and Subjugation: Native Hawaiian and Japanese American Discourse over Hawaiian Statehood

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Research and Library Resources Essay

My thesis was inspired by the article "Why Asian Settler Colonialism Matters" by sociologist Dean Saranillio, which chronicles Asian Americans' marginalization of Native Hawaiians. As an Asian American from Hawaii, I was intrigued by this topic. My project thus investigates the consequences Japanese American advocacy for Hawaiian statehood had on Native Hawaiians.

Based on the Leatherby Library databases that Rand Boyd recommended, I started my research by identifying key literature through Academic Search Premier and JSTOR. Initially, I searched "Hawaii Statehood," "Japanese Americans," and "Native Hawaiians" over 1940-1960, and found leading historians, like John Whitehead and Roger Bell. However, I realized that although my thesis focused on 1945-1959, the 19th century strongly defined Hawaiian and Japanese relations. A critical example is the 1870s racial segregation of plantation labor, whereby white employers actively pit Hawaiian and Japanese workers against each other to prevent unionization. This defined group relations through agonistic competition for decades.

Admission discourse needed to be framed within this context. I therefore redefined timeliness and relevance along two criteria: an event was timely and relevant if it directly impacted Hawaiian and Japanese relations and identity. After expanding my search to the chronological scope of 1870-1960, I made an important discovery in the book, "Local Story: The Massie-Kahahawai Case," by University of Hawaii historian John Rosa. Rosa chronicles Hawaiian and Japanese responses to the 1931 Massie Affair, in which white navymen lynched a Hawaiian man and assaulted a Japanese man, but were pardoned for their crimes. I found primary sources detailing responses to the Massie Affair using Leatherby Libraries' access to the Chronicling America newspapers database. This helped me revise my argument to incorporate

the Hawaiian-Japanese solidarity formed in the tragedy's aftermath. Essentially, racial solidarity disincentivized Hawaiians from opposing statehood, because statehood offered symbolic redress to Hawaii's Japanese plurality for WWII internment.

I'd established rapport with Rosa in 2019 when I emailed him how much I enjoyed his book, and later sought his advice on research when the pandemic hit. He directed me toward UH's Online Archives, which house full records of the 1903-1959 congressional statehood hearings, and explained how to request scans from archivists. From there, I contacted UH archivist Dawn Sueoka, who sent me 140 pages of the Spark Matsunaga and Hiram Fong statehood collections. This included documents distributed to statehood delegates who lobbied Congress in 1954. Through genealogical research conducted via Leatherby Libraries' access to Ancestry.com, I discovered that many of these delegates were Hawaiian. However, there were no Hawaiian speakers at the 1954 hearings. This proved that Hawaiians were excluded from public discourse and relegated to behind the scenes work, leading to the marginalization of their interests.

I spent months evaluating my findings from Leatherby and UH, starting with determining source authority. Sociology and political science have greatly contributed to historiography, but both disciplines make normative arguments that bias historical interpretation. Thus, I investigated their bibliographies to see if, by objectively analyzing the same sources, I arrived at similar conclusions.

Evaluating purpose and accuracy was my next step. Statehood history—a contest for political legitimacy between Hawaiians and Japanese Americans—carries inherent biases. To ensure biases did not diminish accuracy, I employed both quantitative and qualitative checks. In R programming language, I coded US Census data from the Inter-University Consortium for

Political and Social Science Research. I compiled population, income, rural habitancy, and poverty rates among Hawaiians and Japanese Americans. This numeric baseline validated arguments of Hawaiians' hardships, and disproved claims of Japanese economic hegemony. Qualitatively, I utilized testimonies from the 1946-1959 statehood hearings. I cited testimonies from working-class Hawaiians, who supported statehood because it offered them financial relief, to refute claims that all Hawaiians opposed statehood on nationalist grounds.

Because I hope to pursue academia, specifically economic history and political economy, this experience has been invaluable. I've practiced interdisciplinary critical inquiry across all three of my majors—political science, history, and economics—which will help me in graduate school. Additionally, researching during the pandemic has made me more resourceful and proactive, as I networked with established scholars to gain access to the materials I needed.

On a broader note, my work is valuable to statehood history, which has recently oscillated between two extremes: the dominant, pro-Japanese narrative, and the pro-indigenous counterclaim. Contrastingly, my thesis joins and balances Native Hawaiian and Japanese American experiences, and contributes greater nuance to statehood scholarship.

Finally, my thesis offers an important political takeaway. Asian Americans, with the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes, are dealing with the same problem we faced 60 years ago. How can we secure justice without detracting from the needs of other minorities? Centered on this duality of competition and solidarity inherent in the struggle for equality, my work is a critical reflection on Asian American political identity—now needed more than ever before.

Excerpt from: "SECTION FIVE: POLITICAL CLIMATE, 1945-1946"

An important component of Native Hawaiian political agency in the statehood hearings of 1946 was the manner through which the indigenous people navigated the hostile racial climate of the continental US. Although prejudice was a universal experience for the community regardless of wealth, elites were able to adapt to their circumstances with greater dignity than their working-class peers. In response to the racism they faced, Hawaiian elites presented themselves before Congress as conventional examples of loyal American citizens, while working-class Hawaiians were forced to conform to harmful stereotypes.

The Hawaiian elites' strategy is well-exemplified by their testimonies in the 1946 hearings. Take, for example, Hawaiian statehood delegates and territorial officials David K. Trask and Judge Walter Meheula Heen. Trask claimed that, following the monarchy's overthrow and American annexation, Hawaiians enjoyed the new rights and liberties of American citizenship and grew to love the country. In a complementary fashion, Heen asserted that Native Hawaiians "would not exchange their right of American citizenship for anything else in the world."[1] Expectedly, Trask and Heen did not mention the historic frictions between Hawaiians and white Americans, which had led to hate crimes against the natives in the Massie Affair just 15 years prior. By characterizing Hawaiians as eager and educated patriots who would not dare challenge the political status quo, this strategy made Hawaiians non-threatening to white American hegemony and highly palatable and credible to Congress.

On the other hand, working-class Native Hawaiians were forced to flatter Western ideals and also exaggerate and fabricate individual shortcomings to fit into degrading stereotypes. Mainstream prejudices characterized Native Hawaiians as lazy, backwards, and unintelligent.

[1] US Congress, House of Representatives, "Statehood for Hawaii: Hearing on H.R. Con. Res. 236 Before the House Subcommittee of the Committee of the Territories," 79th Congress, 1946: 20.

These degrading assumptions necessitated self-subjugation at both the personal and communal levels. David Ka'apuawaokamehameha was one of many forced to adopt this humiliating strategy. The farmer introduced himself with the disclaimer that he was barely fluent in English and practically illiterate, much to the amusement of the chamber. He then presented Congress with myriad Hawaiian foodstuffs—raw fish, taro, and poi—as products of the free labor that flourished after US annexation, and spoke gratefully about the overthrow of the monarchy. Ka'apuawaokamehameha also repeatedly referenced his Christian faith to show he was aligned with mainstream American views, claiming that the formerly polytheistic Hawaiians were "found" as "pagans in the dark age," and he was glad that Americans "civilized" them.[2]

Such denigrations of personal and Hawaiian identity further extended themselves into Ka'apuawaokamehameha's actual statehood arguments. The farmer, after referencing the need for the federal government's assistance to the Hawaiian community, joked, "If we adopted statehood and if something is wrong here, we can call up Uncle Sam and you boys: 'hey, help please, Uncle, something is wrong!'"[3] The chamber was wrought with laughter at Ka'apuawaokamehameha's performance. Such platitudes and deprecations appealed strongly to white prejudices which had historically emphasized paternalistic treatment toward the indigenous people; therefore, Ka'apuawaokamehameha's comfortable fit into pre-existing, racist stereotypes made him palatable to Congress.

One might argue that it is impossible to assert Ka'apuawaokamehameha's intentions from his testimony. However, Ka'apuawaokamehameha fully understood the importance of gaining Congress's favor, as he emphasized: "I get an opportunity to speak to [Congress] face to face, not to pass it to the other guy, who passes the buck, and it never reaches you. It's a golden

[2] House of Representatives, "Statehood for Hawaii," 79th Congress, 1946: 239.
[3] House of Representatives, "Statehood for Hawaii," 79th Congress, 1946: 240.

opportunity that I have to express my thoughts."[4] For working-class Hawaiians like Ka'apuawaokamehameha, U'u, Nihoa, and Peters—who struggled to feed and clothe themselves and their children—testifying before Congress offered them a chance at securing economic relief and survival. With such extreme stakes, personal pride was inconsequential as long as they could make their demands heard. After winning Congress over with his performance of an indigenous caricature, Ka'apuawaokamehameha did exactly that. In a sobering tone, he demanded: "Coming down to statehood, what protection will we Hawaiians have when statehood is adopted? What protection?"[5]

The contrasting statements of Trask and Heen versus Ka'apuawaokamehameha demonstrate class-based privileges that divided the Hawaiian community. Although both groups flattered Americanism whilst subordinating Hawaiian culture, elites were able to maintain their dignity at the individual level while working-class Hawaiians conformed to racist stereotypes in order to gain congressional favor. That being said, the group as a whole still suffered a baseline hardship: subordination to white supremacy. The humiliation of Native Hawaiians in this regard lies in devastating contrast to the future identity-based privileges Japanese Americans would enjoy. While Japanese Americans would increasingly base their statehood opinions on narratives of heroism and dignity, Native Hawaiians had to present themselves as comical and subservient in order to be heard.

[4] House of Representatives, "Statehood for Hawaii," 79th Congress, 1946: 240.
[5] House of Representatives, "Statehood for Hawaii," 79th Congress, 1946: 240.

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