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# Sovereignty, Statehood, and Subjugation: Native Hawaiian and Japanese American Discourse over Hawaiian Statehood

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Native Hawaiian and Japanese American Discourse over Hawaiian Statehood

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Senior History Thesis: Spring 2021 Nicole Saito, CO 2022

Special Thanks:

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#### Native Hawaiian and Japanese Americans

- First Contact (1778)
- Sugar Economy (1835)
  - Diversion of key resources from Hawaiian lands
- Asian Immigration begins (1850s-1860s)





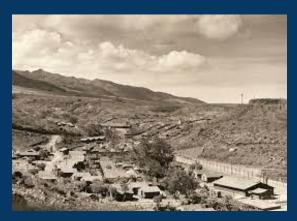
### Shifting Tides: World War Two

Hawaii's geopolitical identity equated with Japanese American identity

- Executive Order 9066

#### Sacrifice in Suffering:

- Military Service
  - 442nd, 100th Battalion, MIS





Thesis: The 'Reversal of Fortunes'

Although Native Hawaiians originally exercised the greatest influence of any nonwhite group in statehood discourse (1903-1948), the post-war period ultimately changed their political circumstances. By 1954, Japanese Americans had achieved ascendancy, and the indigenous peoples were sidelined.



### Community Viewpoints on Statehood

#### Japanese Americans:

- Overwhelmingly supported statehood
  - Vehicle for recognition of equal citizenship post-incarceration

#### Native Hawaiians:

- No standard consensus amongst Hawaiians
- Elites were apt to take radical stances for/against
  - Mixed-white, wealthy, powerful
- Working-Class Hawaiians were moderate
  - Supported statehood for tangible interests





#### Economic Dissonance: Native Hawaiian Mobilization

Working Class: (Ernest U'U, Gus Nihoa)

"Yes, I am in favor of statehood. Perhaps in some way if we get statehood, we will be taken care of by the Federal Government, at least the Hawaiian race will be... That is the only reason [I want it]."<sup>37</sup>

"for what us poor people could get by having statehood, as all we want is just a means of getting food and clothing. It would be good."38



#### Economic Dissonance: Native Hawaiian Mobilization

#### Palpable Class Tensions:

- Victor Kaleoaloha Houston, 1948:

"[The Native Hawaiians must] be helped by the Federal Government," he stated with conviction. "Kamokila Campbell, who appeared before... is beneficiary of the Campbell estate, with eighty-some thousand acres of the most valuable land. [She receives] an income of some \$125,000 a year without turning a finger."51





- Working Class resentment hinders mobilization
  - Elites do a poor job of representing and advocating for all Hawaiians



#### Native Hawaiians: Economic Reform in the Red Scare

#### Working Class Interests: economic reform

- Red Scare (1948-1954):
  - Economic reform requires
     acknowledgement that American
     capitalism is oppressive
  - Native Hawaiians emphasize Americanism, patriotism
- But no way to meaningfully advocate for economic interests while denouncing Communism



### Japanese Americans: Accommodation into Americanism

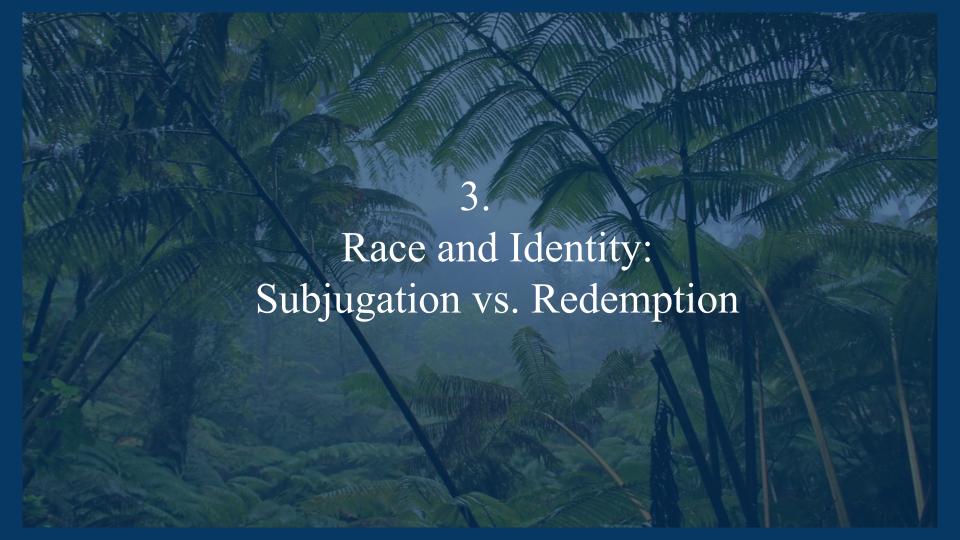
Interests of entire group: recognition of American citizenship

Accommodation-- not reform

#### Daniel Inouye (1954):

"I gave this arm to fight fascists. If my country wants the other one to fight communists, it can have it. What are you prepared to give?"





### Japanese Americans: Redemption of Identity

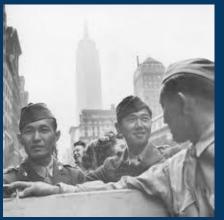
#### Positive Self-Assertion of AJA Identity:

- Steeped in heroism, patriotism, sacrifice

#### Congressional Support: (1957)

- Senator Frank Church of Idaho:
  - "I had an opportunity to serve with a number of Nisei in the Far East... And I have never known a group of men who displayed a greater dedication to duty or who demonstrated a more steadfast loyalty to their country than those Nisei."





### Native Hawaiians: Racial Subjugation

Forced to present as either comical or subservient in order to be heard.

- Community Subjugation: praised American annexation of the islands, subjugated Hawaiian culture to Western culture
- <u>Individual Subjugation</u>: performed racist stereotypes-unintelligent, lazy, infantile

#### David Ka'apuawaokamehameha:

- Emphasized this was his "golden opportunity" to speak to Congress directly
  - Knew he had one shot to secure Hawaiian interests-- was willing to forego personal dignity
- The Hawaiians were "found" as "pagans in the Dark Age"



"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!"43

### Conclusion: Holistic Comparison

#### Hawaiians:

- Insidious discrimination: imperialism, colonialism
  - Lack of agricultural resources, educational opportunities, welfare programs, infertile land
- Desire for economic reform during Cold War
- Identity-based arguments steeped in negative stereotypes

#### <u>Japanese Americans:</u>

- Prolific civil rights violation--highly visible to public
  - Incarceration condemned by minority in Supreme Court, informally by Truman (1946)
- Request for accommodation into American democracy, capitalism
- Identity based in patriotism, loyalty to US, sacrifice



## Questions?

Email <u>nsaito@chapman.edu</u> for full thesis!

