The Japanese American Contemporary Experience in Hawai‘i

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Introduction:
The Contemporary Japanese American Community in Hawai‘i

JONATHAN Y. OKAMURA


This recent trend continues that of the 1980s when again primarily historical works were published in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Japanese immigration to Hawai‘i in 1985 such as Roland Kotani’s The Japanese in Hawaii: A Century of Struggle. The last book on the contemporary Japanese American experience is Dennis M. Ogawa’s Jan Ken Po: The World of Hawai‘i’s Japanese Americans published in 1973. It also has been nearly 25 years since the last major edited collection on Japanese Americans was published, that is, Kodomo No Tame Ni: For the Sake of the Children by Ogawa (1978).

One of the major contributions of Social Process in Hawai‘i since it began publication in 1935 is its documentation of social and cultural contemporary life in the islands such that the issues from previous decades can be appreciated at present for the valuable insights and information they provide. We are indeed fortunate to be able to benefit from the scholarly research conducted by Romanzo Adams, Andrew Lind, Bernhard Hormann, and other faculty and students in the Department of Sociology at the University of Hawai‘i in the 1930s through the 1950s. In addition to providing descriptions and analyses of the contemporary Japanese American community, the present volume of
**Social Process** is intended to serve a similar purpose for scholars in future decades since, as I have noted above, studies of the contemporary local Japanese experience are very much lacking.

**Current Status of the Japanese American Community**

According to the 2000 U.S. Census (2001), the Japanese American population of Hawai‘i, including part-Japanese, was 296,674, including 201,764 who claimed to be full Japanese. Unlike in previous censuses, in 2000 respondents were allowed to indicate that they belonged to more than one race or ethnic group, and 32 percent of the total number of Japanese Americans in Hawai‘i did so, that is, nearly one-third of local Japanese are part-Japanese, indicative of increased intermarriage among the Sansei and Yonsei generations.1 Persons of Japanese descent (full and part) can be considered to constitute 24.5 percent of Hawaii’s population of 1,211,537 which is slightly higher than the 22.3 percent they represented in 1990. However, those percentages are not necessarily comparable because in 1990 census respondents could state they belonged to only one racial or ethnic group, and some part-Japanese may have opted to indicate membership in another racial or ethnic group. Taking into consideration multiple-counting of multiracial/ethnic persons (for example, a Japanese-Filipino individual would be counted as belonging to both groups if s/he had indicated such when completing the 2000 census form), Japanese Americans continue to constitute the second largest racial/ethnic group in Hawai‘i as in 1990 after Whites and before Filipino Americans, Native Hawaiians and Chinese Americans.2 This second ranking is a little surprising given the relatively lower birthrate among local Japanese and the lack of significant immigration from Japan of about 500 persons per year. Based on ethnicity of the mother, Japanese represented 12.5 percent of resident live births in Hawai‘i in 1998 (State Department of Health 2001:2).

In terms of socioeconomic status, the 2000 U.S. Census has not yet released information on occupational, income and educational status by race and ethnicity for Hawai‘i. However, I do not think that there was much change in the socioeconomic status of Japanese Americans since 1990, and they continue to be one of the dominant groups along with Chinese Americans and Whites (Okamura 1998:200–201). If anything, because of the recession in Hawai‘i for most of the 1990s, Japanese Americans together with the latter groups enhanced their socioeconomic position relative to the more disadvan-
taged groups such as Native Hawaiians, Filipino Americans and Samoans that continue to remain overrepresented in blue collar work.

Local Japanese are able to maintain if not increase their socioeconomic status because most families have the financial resources to reproduce themselves socially in succeeding generations, a process that Ethnic Studies scholar George Lipsitz (1998) has described for Whites as “intergenerational transfer of wealth.” That is, most Japanese Americans (not necessarily only parents but including grandparents) have sufficient income, wealth and property that can be used to ensure their children's (or grandchildren's) socioeconomic future especially through investing in education. For wealthier families with the necessary financial resources, education may mean private schooling for their children from kindergarten through high school at Honolulu’s elite schools such as Punahou and ‘Iolani and college and graduate or professional school on the U.S. continent. For other less financially able families, investment in education may mean public schooling but financial assistance provided to children to attend college on the continental United States or at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.3 Japanese Americans continue to constitute the largest group among undergraduate students at UH Mānoa (25 percent), double their representation in the public school system, and are the second largest group among graduate students (19 percent).

The limited number of children in Japanese American families, generally one or two, lessens the financial burden of private school and college education, and this is a primary reason why parents decide to have small families. The result is another generation with a high proportion of college graduates who can assume the same or higher occupational status as their parents and thus the overall maintenance of the socioeconomic status of Japanese in Hawai‘i. However, despite these financial advantages and benefits, the Yonsei are not necessarily the “spoiled” generation they have been called because they have been coming of age when Hawai‘i’s economy has been in a prolonged recession since the early 1990s, and that has led some of them to join the “brain drain” to the continental United States for better economic opportunities rather than remaining in Hawai‘i with family and friends.

As for the political status of local Japanese, in this election year of 2002 as in previous such years, there is no shortage of male and female Japanese American candidates seeking state and county offices including U.S. representative, governor and lieutenant governor, state senator and representative, and
county council person. Despite their declining percentage of Hawai'i's population since 1960 (32 percent), Japanese Americans continue to hold a substantial proportion of seats in the State Legislature, including a majority in the Senate and one-third in the House of Representatives. One reason that has been advanced for their electoral success is that a higher percentage of local Japanese vote compared to other ethnic/racial groups, and they supposedly vote as a bloc for Japanese American candidates, an accusation that began in the 1930s when Japanese emerged as the largest group of voters. The populatio

of bloc voting can be challenged by the recent election losses of Pat Saiki as the Republican candidate for U.S. senator in 1990 and governor in 1994 since the victories of Senator Daniel K. Akaka and Governor Ben Cayetano were attributed in part to substantial Japanese American electoral support. Local Japanese may vote as a bloc but not for Japanese American Republican candidates.

In fact, local Japanese vote more regularly than others do, another factor that may contribute to the success of Japanese American office seekers is the dismal voting record of Hawai'i citizens. In 2000, a presidential election year, less than a majority (47 percent) of those eligible to vote did so, the worst turnout in the nation, and the percentage of such voters has declined steadily since 1960 (71 percent) in Hawai'i's first post-statehood election ("Voting meltdown a concern," Honolulu Advertiser, July 28, 2002:A1). As recently as 1990 before the state government initiated several ways to make it easier to register to vote, only 66 percent of Hawai'i citizens were registered, a figure that has risen to 81 percent in 2000. Voter apathy or disgust with politics and politicians contributes to incumbents remaining in office, another factor that follows in Japanese American overrepresentation in the State Legislature. The substantial proportion of local Japanese in large public worker unions, such as the Hawaii Government Employees Association and the Hawaii State Teachers Association, that can provide endorsements and financial and human resources for campaigning is yet another reason for Japanese American election to office.

However, with increasing numbers of Yonsei coming of voting age, political change may be forthcoming. In a lecture on "The Future of the Democratic Party and the Japanese American Community" to my Japanese in Hawai'i class in October 1998, U.S. Senator Daniel K. Inouye maintained that, "The Japanese American community will be split right down the middle in voting and won't be voting in a bloc for too long and recalling World War II." The Senator was referring to the significant difference in social values and attitudes between, on the one hand, the Nisei and more liberal Sansei who tend to vote Democratic and, on the other, the Yonsei who are more likely to vote Republican, although they also may support Democratic candidates. However, the Yonsei are like other young Hawai'i citizens who constitute a significant segment of those not registered to vote or who do not vote regularly.

Summary of Articles

The articles included in this volume address some of the more significant social, cultural and political processes in the Japanese American community including the passing on of the Nisei generation and the consequent disappearance of Japanese plantation communities and institutions, changing interpretations of who is considered to be Japanese American as a result of increasing intermarriage over the years, Sansei and Yonsei criticisms of the Nisei generation and of the general political and economic dominance of local Japanese without regard for the status and concerns of less privileged groups, and the reclaiming and reconstruction of Uchinanchu identity by Yonsei Okinawans. Certainly, there are other contemporary social processes and issues not addressed by our volume such as the aforementioned brain drain of Yonsei to the U.S. continent, the meaning and significance of local Japanese identity, and the increasing socioeconomic mobility of Japanese American women into professional and managerial positions.

The articles by Gaku Kinoshita and Eileen H. Tamura both can be considered retrospective analyses of the Nisei generation that historically played a pivotal role in the transition of Japanese from Issei plantation laborers to Sansei middle-class professionals. In "Telling Our Roots in the Sugar Plantation: Collective Identities of Japanese American Elderly in Puna, Hawai'i," Kinoshita explores how elderly Nisei and Sansei who grew up in a former plantation community employ retrospective narratives of their life stories as a means to construct their ethnic, class and generational identities. His article details the decline of the Japanese American plantation community as the elderly share their collective memories of the "closeness and liveliness" of the community in the past with its numerous language schools, churches, stores and other businesses, kenjinkai (prefectural associations), kumiai (neighborhood associations), and plantation camp associations. Kinoshita maintains that "Crafting and imposing specific meanings on certain phrases such as 'Us, Japanese,' 'hard work,' and 'our days' in telling their stories of their past
plantation lives, the Japanese American elderly construct shared understandings of values and qualities that they believe...distinguish ‘us’ from ‘them.’”

Despite the “glorification” of the Nisei for their individual and collective accomplishments, Eileen H. Tamura’s “In Retrospect: Second-Generation Japanese Americans in Hawai‘i” discusses recent criticisms of the Nisei by younger local Japanese that emerged in the late 1990s given their political and economic domination in Hawai‘i during the latter decades of the past century. These criticisms were directed at such revered figures in the Japanese American community as the World War II veterans and U.S. Senator Daniel K. Inouye. Commenting on these controversies, Tamura contends that “the public debate may be an indication that the Nikkei as a group has matured in such a way that its members feel comfortable in disagreeing and criticizing each other openly.”

Such criticisms are evident in Candace Fujikane’s “Sweeping Racism under the Rug of ‘Censorship’: The Controversy over Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s Blu’s Hanging” that was originally published in Whose Vision?: Asian Settler Colonialism in Hawai‘i, a special issue of Amerasia Journal (2000) that she co-edited with Jonathan Y. Okamura. Her essay clearly demonstrates how local Filipino protests against a fiction award given to Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s novel Blu’s Hanging by the Association for Asian American Studies in 1998 were recast by the local and national media as a “cover story of censorship” that obscured Japanese American racism and domination in Hawai‘i. As Fujikane, a Yonsei Japanese from Maui, argues, “Local Japanese...continue to tell the stories of our oppression in ways that fail to acknowledge our present oppression of other groups like local Filipinos, and, in the larger picture of colonialism in Hawai‘i, local Japanese benefit from the subjugation of Native Hawaiians.”

Another critical perspective from the Yonsei generation is provided by Carrie Y. Takahata’s poem, “Making Yonsei,” that is the only literary or sociological work I know of that directly addresses the contemporary dilemmas of that the most recent adult generation of Japanese Americans. The poem highlights some of the ongoing cultural and social changes among the Yonsei such as the inability of at least some of them to speak “pidgin” English and the lack of knowledge of Japanese culture. However, in the making of the Yonsei, as Takahata writes, is it a valid question to ask, “what went wrong?”

What has been going on with the Yonsei and Sansei generations is the declining significance of “traditional” Japanese culture and values of kachikan brought to Hawai‘i by the Issei and maintained to a substantial degree by their Nisei children. Traditional cultural practices and beliefs, most evident in the Japanese language and the Buddhist religion, have been replaced with an evolving local Japanese or Japanese American culture, values and identity. Certainly, not all traditional cultural values have been lost over the generations, such as shame (haji), debt of gratitude (on) and filial piety (koko), but they do not necessarily have the same significance or meaning for the Sansei and Yonsei as they did for the Issei and Nisei. Nonetheless, despite the former generations becoming less Japanese culturally, Japanese American identity is still strongly claimed by them, and there is no disavowal of that identity.

Yet another view of the Yonsei is contributed by Norman Kaneshiro in his “Uchinanchu Identity in Hawai‘i” that is concerned with local Okinawans, especially of that generation. In my Ethnic Studies course on Japanese in Hawai‘i, I have referred to these young Okinawans as the “born-again Uchinanchu” because of their ongoing efforts to reclaim their ethnic identity from being viewed as Japanese American. As Kaneshiro argues, “The main component of Uchinanchu identity has always been the deeply rooted need to separate and distinguish itself from Japanese identity.” Based on in-depth interviews with four local Uchinanchu, he analyzes how they construct and express Uchinanchu identity through Okinawan classical music and dance that some of them learned by studying in Okinawa, as Kaneshiro did himself.

The passage of time has resulted in either the decline of “traditional” local Japanese community institutions or their significant adjustment to contemporary conditions in order to continue. These issues are discussed in Christine R. Yano’s article, “Mixing the Plate: Performing Japanese American Identity on the Stage of the Cherry Blossom Festival Queen Pageant in Honolulu, Hawai‘i,” that is about one such long-term institution in the local Japanese community. However, Yano contends that the Cherry Blossom Festival “stands in danger of becoming an archaic institution...in part because of the decreasing salience of ‘Japanese American’ as a separate and separable segment of a larger community in Hawai‘i.” She observes that major Japanese American community organizations such as kenjinkai and Buddhist temples have had difficulty maintaining an active membership, particularly among youth, as “a sense of community centered around some form of Japanese American identity wanes.”

My article on “Baseball and Beauty Queens: The Political Context of Ethnic Boundary Making in the Japanese American Community in Hawai‘i”
is concerned with two recent cases of such boundary construction through formal descent-based rules involving the O'ahu AJA (Americans of Japanese Ancestry) Senior Baseball League and the Cherry Blossom Queen pageant of the Honolulu Japanese Junior Chamber of Commerce. As a comparative case, I also discuss the *Rice v. Cayetano* decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in 2000 that was focused on a descent-based rule concerning Native Hawaiian voting rights. While Japanese Americans as an ethnic group and Native Hawaiians as the indigenous people of Hawai'i differ widely in their historical and contemporary political and economic statuses, I contend that in both the AJA baseball league and the Native Hawaiian voting rights cases neoconservative arguments centered on individual rights and racial discrimination were advanced to contest their respective descent-based rules as local manifestations of the nation-wide neoconservative political movement.

The unannotated bibliography from 1988 through 2001 on Japanese Americans in Hawai'i is intended to serve as a research resource and an update of the previous work by Joan Hori on *The Japanese in Hawai'i: A Bibliography of Publications, Audiovisual Media, and Archival Collections* (1988). It consists of two primary sections, that is, “Books, Theses and Articles” and “Video Recordings and Music Recordings,” and the entries in each section are categorized into relevant subject areas. The sources in both sections of the bibliography reflect the focus on primarily historical processes and issues in Japanese American studies in Hawai'i. Contributing to the historical works are commemorative books, booklets and videos produced by private organizations, such as World War II veterans clubs and Buddhist and Christian churches, and several autobiographies and biographies by and about Nisei individuals in the twilight of their lives.

**Acknowledgments**

I express my gratitude to Prof. Emeritus Kiyoshi Ikeda, Executive Editor of *Social Process in Hawai'i*, for providing the opportunity to publish our articles in the journal and for advancing journal funds for production costs. This volume is dedicated to Kiyoshi in recognition and appreciation for his fifty-year contribution of outstanding research and scholarship on the peoples and cultures of Hawai'i beginning with his 1950 article on “The Okinawan-Naichi Relationship” (co-authored with Henry Toyama) that appeared in a *Social Process in Hawai'i* issue. Kiyoshi also has been a consistently strong advocate of minority access to higher education throughout his distinguished academic career at UH Mānoa and previously at Oberlin College.

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Lastly, I thank my mother, Yoshiko “Jean” Okamura, whose father immigrated from Hiroshima prefecture and her mother from Fukuoka, for permitting me to use an untitled painting of hers completed in 1974 for the cover of this volume.

**Notes**

1. Based on data from 1983 to 1994 for marriages registered with the state Department of Health, Japanese American females (51.4%) and males (43.5%) outmarry above or near the overall rate for Hawai'i (46.2%) during that period (Fu and Heaton 1997:93). In their study, Fu and Heaton appropriately included only those marriages in which at least one of the spouses was a state resident because of the substantial number of “honeymoon” weddings in Hawai'i of couples from Japan and North America.

2. Emphasizing that these figures do not represent individuals because of multiple counting of multiracial/ethnic persons, the 2000 Census provided the following data for “race alone or in combination”: Whites (476,162), Filipino Americans (275,728), Native Hawaiians (239,655), Chinese Americans (176,803), Korean Americans (41,352), African Americans (33,343), and Samoans (28,184) (U.S. Census Bureau 2001).

3. Like other local students, a majority of Japanese students at UH Mānoa work on a part-time basis while attending the university and thereby contribute to meeting the cost of their education.

4. There is an earlier poem titled “Yonsei” by Juliet Kono that appeared in her *Hilo Rains* (1988).
Telling Our Roots in the Sugar Plantation: Collective Identities of Japanese American Elderly in Puna, Hawai‘i

Gaku Kinoshita

This article discusses the collective identities of Japanese American elderly in a former sugar plantation community in the rural town of Puna, Hawai‘i by examining their life stories in which they remember, evaluate, and represent their plantation lives from the 1920s to the 1970s. I question how the Japanese American elderly interweave the issues of ethnicity, class, and generation in their shared images of plantation life, and document the multiplicity of their collective identities that lies in their stories about work, family, and community. Exploring the constructive aspects of collective identities, I also record culturally specific meanings of local phrases (e.g., “Us, Japanese,” “hard work,” and “our days”) that signify their common understandings of values and qualities that the Japanese American elderly believe are their distinctive characteristics that distinguish “us” from “them.”

Locating church activities, plantation reunions, community festivals, funerals, and intensive interviews as sites where the stories of plantation lives are told, I collected stories from the Japanese American elderly. They are those who: 1) were born in Hawai‘i before World War II; 2) have Japanese ancestry; and 3) have the experience of plantation life in Puna. The goal of this article is to explore how the Japanese American elderly employ retrospective narratives as a medium for the construction of their collective identities and for definition of their “peoplehood” as plantation-raised Japanese Americans.

Puna Sugar Plantation and the Japanese Community

Puna Sugar Company, Ltd. (hereafter Puna Sugar) was established initially as Ōla‘a Sugar Company in 1899 with its plantation on the Big Island of Hawai‘i. Two years later Japanese constituted 82 percent of the plantation work force. As late as 1936, despite the end of Japanese immigration in 1924...
and the subsequent labor recruitment of Filipinos, a majority of the plantation
to work force was still Japanese (54 percent) who were followed by Filipinos (32
percent) (HSPA Archives). Following management policy based on ethnic
separatism and plantation paternalism for work efficiency and prevention of
labor resistance, Puna Sugar managed imported laborers and their families
until 1946 when the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s
Union (ILWU) won a territory-wide sugar strike. Under these circumstances,
workers and their spouses from Japan established roots on the plantation and
formed an ethnic community by developing commercial centers (with grocery
stores, shops, churches and schools) and by founding social and cultural
institutions such as Buddhist churches, Japanese language schools, and prefec-
tural associations.

Given its growing population, by 1910 Japanese on the plantation had
founded a Christian church and two Buddhist temples (Ola’a Kuttistown
Oldtimers Reunion 1996). They also had established nine Japanese language
schools for 1,265 students by 1939 (Ozawa 1972:269) and various community
organizations such as kenjinkai (prefectural associations) kumiai (neighbor-
hood associations) and plantation camp associations. Most of these community
organizations have faded out with the decline in the Japanese population.
However, Buddhist churches remain an important institution in the community
for conducting funerals, weddings, Sunday services, and annual events
(e.g., bon dance) through which the Japanese American elderly socialize and
maintain their ties. Buddhist churches also play a significant role for Japanese
American families by holding family memorial services, including graveyard
services, where family members show respect and appreciation to their
ancestors. For the Japanese American elderly who attended Japanese language
schools organized by Buddhist churches, these religious services are particular-
ly meaningful. Kumiai also is another important institution for the Japanese
American elderly. Paying an annual membership fee, most Japanese families
participate in kumiai for the assistance provided by its members in holding a
funeral.

After a long struggle for profit, American Factors (Puna Sugar’s agent)
decided in 1982 to close down the plantation, and in 1984 Puna Sugar ceased
operations, laying off 485 workers. With no other industry in the area, many
laid-off workers and their families left the Puna area for new jobs, except for
those who went into farming or were at retirement age. While newcomers were
moving into new subdivisions, local shopkeepers and independent sugarcane
growers gave up their businesses and also moved from Puna. Since the closing
of Puna Sugar, the Japanese community, after having prospered as the largest
ethnic group on the plantation, has been languishing because no alternative
economic resources have kept people in Puna. Currently, the Japanese
community consists of the descendants of the original Japanese immigrants,
that is, retired Japanese American elderly who were born and raised on the
plantation, including some who have lived in Puna their entire lives and others
who have returned after working in urban areas. According to the 2000 U.S.
Census, the Japanese population in the old plantation residential areas of Puna
Sugar, not including the new subdivisions, was 1,282. At present, Caucasians
are the largest group in the Puna district, having moved into new housing areas,
and are followed by Native Hawaiians and Filipinos.

“Us, Japanese”: Ethnic Identity

Old days, Pahoa was all Japanese... There were many restaurants, Tsubota
restaurant, Toma restaurant, Iwata restaurant... There were two bakeries,
Toita bakery, Iwata bakery. There were two theaters, too, Tsubota and
Akebono. There was also a pool bar and three bars, Tsubota, Miura, Hara.
...People were hanging out there until late at night, yeah... At night,
fishermen used to stop by and eat saimin on the way back to Kapoho. They
were all Japanese. Even in school classroom, among 25 classmates, we had
only maybe one Filipino, one Chinese, one Portuguese... In Pahoa, there
were only one Chinese family, about three Portuguese families, and maybe
two Haole families. All the rest were Japanese. Filipinos were, at that time,
all single.

Today, living everyday life as American citizens with other Japanese and
non-Japanese, the Japanese American elderly do not have ethnic conflicts in
Puna and rarely touch upon ethnic issues in daily conversation. They are
currently retirees whose social world is within households and neighborhoods
in Puna where no numerical majority ethnic group exists. They mainly
socialize with family members, relatives, friends, and long-time acquaintances
and are involved in local institutions (e.g., churches, neighborhood associa-
tions, senior citizen clubs, and volunteer activities) that consist mostly of long-
time residents who are familiar with each other. Being Japanese is not an issue
for them in their present lives.

When the Japanese American elderly remember and talk about their
plantation lives, however, being Japanese becomes a crucial element in their
stories because their plantation experiences were inseparable from “things
about Japanese” such as families, neighborhoods, language schools, and local
institutions in the prewar period on the plantation. Growing up in a Japanese family and community had a significant impact on them in shaping their collective memories of plantation life as well as in developing their ways of viewing Japanese and non-Japanese. Thus, being Japanese is the focal point to construct their image of themselves and of other ethnic groups in the past and the present.

To illustrate the images of themselves, the Japanese American elderly discuss various themes that they believe are unique to their plantation experience. Talking about their childhood at home, Japanese neighborhoods, Issei disciplinary training, Japanese local institutions, the wartime, and inter-ethnic and intraethnic differences, they characterize aspects of Japanese plantation life with the phrase, “Us, Japanese.” This expression is the key phrase that represents the ethnic identity of the Japanese American elderly and serves as a communicative marker to signify specific ethnic aspects according to the context of the story. For example, “Us, Japanese” may be characterized by Japanese things and thoughts taught by the Issei at home, closeness and liveliness in Japanese neighborhoods, strictness in Japanese disciplinary training, Issei leadership in institutional activities, and bitterness and pride in wartime memories. Analyzing their stories according to the seven themes noted at the beginning of this paragraph, I explore the meanings of “Us, Japanese” rooted in the ethnic identity of the Japanese American elderly.

When the Japanese American elderly tell stories about their childhood at home, they focus on their experiences of interacting with Issei parents or grandparents and construct their ethnic identity based on their “Japanese” cultural roots passed on from the Issei. The Japanese American elderly were born in Japanese households managed by Issei parents or grandparents with their customs and practices. Growing up with the Issei in their childhood, they were imbued with “Japanese culture.” In their stories, the Japanese American elderly describe how they acquired “Japanese things and thoughts” at home and demonstrate their understanding of Japanese culture with myriads of Japanese words. Showing their familiarity with Japanese food, daily necessities, and furniture, they explain “Japanese” influences on their material life then and now. Exhibiting how they follow Japanese domestic customs (e.g., taking shoes off before entering a house, using chopsticks, and praying before meals), the Japanese American elderly emphasize the importance of “Japanese” culture in their daily lives. Moreover, discussing a “Japanese” sense of morality and social obligation that their Issei parents or grandparents instilled in them, they describe how the Japanese way of social relationships, parent-child relationship in particular, had an impact on them in building and maintaining relationships with their spouse, parents, siblings, relatives, and other Japanese and non-Japanese. Juxtaposing what they learned from the Issei to their present social and cultural lives, the Japanese American elderly find their “Japanese” cultural roots in their childhood at home and define themselves as “Japanese.”

Stories about Japanese neighborhoods also are part of constructing their ethnic identity. Laying out a detailed picture of Japanese neighborhoods that have almost vanished, the Japanese American elderly reminisce about their plantation lives and plot a story. As Renato Rosaldo (1986) points out, to remember the physical traits of one’s living areas is not just to describe what the narrator remembers, but to evoke myriad associations with people with whom one interacted. In this case, a string of Japanese names of families and stores/shops in their stories are connected to the collective memories of Japanese neighbors with which the Japanese American elderly draw images of the closeness and liveliness of the Japanese community. When closeness and liveliness become themes of a story, it is no longer just a description of a neighborhood but a message that intrigues them to remember “Japanese” roots in interpersonal relationships with Japanese neighbors. The collective memories of Japanese neighborhoods are thus resources for the Japanese American elderly to construct their ethnic identity.

From their experiences at Japanese language school, the Japanese American elderly tell stories of how they became familiar with “Japanese” moral values by featuring the strictness of Japanese teachers and parents in disciplinary training. The collective memory of strict discipline at language school is a point that the Japanese American elderly connect to their ethnic identity. Monday through Friday after “English” school they attended Japanese language school where teachers from Japan taught the language as well as shushin (moral training). In their stories, teachers were strict about students’ behavior according to guidelines based on “Japanese” moral codes, and parents also maintained strict discipline and encouraged their children to respect and obey the teachers. These Issei teachers and parents vigorously taught children the importance of respecting elders, harmonious relationships with others, being tidy and punctual, and helping needy persons. The Japanese American elderly, with stories of butsu (punishment) they were given by teachers and parents for misconduct, emphasize strictness in a “Japanese” style of disciplinary training and construct their ethnic identity with the collective memories of having a
“Japanese” moral education from their Issei teachers and parents in those school days.2

Buddhist churches, kenjinkai, kumiai, and plantation camp associations were ethnically organized local institutions in which most Japanese were involved in the prewar period. For the Japanese American elderly, these institutions provided opportunities to interact with the Issei and fellow local Japanese through the Japanese way of social relationships. In their stories, the Japanese American elderly invariably describe how Japanese built trustworthy relationships with a sense of belonging within each institution led by Issei leadership that they regard as the distinctive “Japanese” feature of these institutions. The images of solid institutional bonds in the Japanese community in their stories contribute to the construction of their ethnic identity and to what the Japanese American elderly express as the “Japanese community spirit.”

When the Japanese American elderly talk about non-Japanese, such as Caucasians and other ethnic groups, their stories reflexively illustrate the image of Japanese that mirrors their ethnic identity. Gaijin is a Japanese word (“foreigner”) by which the Japanese American elderly distinguish themselves from others as non-Japanese. They specify gaijin according to their ancestral nationality, such as Chinese, Portuguese, Puerto Rican, Filipino, Korean, and Haole (Caucasian), although they are well aware that most non-Japanese in Puna are American citizens and nationality is not a significant criterion for categorizing people (except for recent immigrants from the Philippines, Pacific Islands, and Asian countries.) In their stories, the Japanese American elderly characterize non-Japanese based on their firsthand experience of interpersonal relationships and on anecdotes of ethnic stereotypes told by family members, friends, and the mass media. In both cases, the images of other ethnic groups are drawn in comparison to the Japanese themselves. Their stereotypic perceptions, such as aggressive Haole in labor negotiations, diligent Filipinos at work, and individualistic Portuguese, are accordingly rephrased as “Haole are more aggressive than Japanese,” “Filipinos are as diligent as Japanese,” and “Portuguese are more individualistic than Japanese.” Their characterization of other ethnic groups is, therefore, an implication from the idealized image that the Japanese American elderly have of their own ethnic identity.

Stories about wartime experiences are based either on the experiences of being discriminated against or on the heroic tales of Japanese American soldiers. On the one hand, their collective memories of the U.S. government’s institutional oppression of Japanese Americans during World War II are accompanied with bitter feelings and become stigmatized remembering, including experiences of martial law, of soldiers stationed in Puna, of investigation of Japanese households, and of internment of Issei community leaders. Retaining memories of discrimination, the Japanese American elderly express their ethnic identity as the negative side of being Japanese. On the other hand, tales of heroic Japanese American soldiers, such as the 442nd Regimental Combat Team and the 100th Infantry Battalion, and stories of their own experiences in the military services in the postwar period evoke pride in being Japanese. Highlighting the qualities of Japanese American soldiers, such as bravery, solidarity, obedience, and diligence, they emphasize these soldiers’ contribution to America and their strong patriotism as Americans. In stories about their wartime experiences, the Japanese American elderly thus construct images of Japanese Americans as both powerless subordinates and as brave and loyal soldiers. Accordingly, their ethnic identity in their wartime stories is double-sided, indicating their ambivalent feelings about their Japanese ancestry.

The Japanese American elderly talk about internal differences among Japanese that are based on ancestral prefecture in Japan or birthplace in Hawai’i. For Japanese immigrants, prefectural boundaries were significant points that divided them in terms of regional identities rooted in the political history of Japan3 and local cultural differences. The Issei, soon after arriving on the plantation, organized kenjinkai to socialize with those who had a common prefectural and cultural background. For the Hawai’i-born Japanese American elderly, however, prefectural distinctions are only concerned with dialect, food, arts, and social customs and have much less influence on them than on the Issei.4 Cultural differences based on prefectural background are so subtle that they are indiscernible to non-Japanese. Nonetheless, the awareness of these subtle differences is crucial to the Japanese American elderly as they speak about their characteristics, and acknowledging distinctive features among themselves is the basis for sharing Japanese ethnic identity. Besides ancestral prefecture in Japan, birthplace or hometown in Hawai’i is also a significant basis for the Japanese American elderly to differentiate themselves. Talking about distinctions among Hawai’i-born Japanese, they focus on which island one was born, in which area (plantation or city) on the Big Island one was born, and which community in Puna one was from (e.g., Ola’a, Pāhoa, Kapoho, Mountain View), and characterize one’s cultural attributes and “personality.”
Although those differences are as subtle as those based on prefectural origins, knowledge of this subtext is also an important resource for the Japanese American elderly in constructing their ethnic identity.

The phrase, "Us, Japanese," represents the ethnic identity of the Japanese American elderly, playing a significant role in its construction. Stories that I sorted by the seven themes discussed above indicate the variety of their experiences of being Japanese and point to their ethnic characteristics such as Japanese customs and practices learned from the Issei, closeness and liveliness in neighborhoods, strictness in moral training, sense of belonging in institutions, differences from other ethnic groups, discrimination and patriotism during the war, and internal differences within the Japanese community. In talking about these characteristics, the Japanese American elderly specify their meanings and connect them to the phrase, “Us, Japanese.” As a consequence, “Us, Japanese” consists of multiple self-descriptions whose meanings are understood according to the context of stories. In one case, “Us, Japanese” may suggest that we were very close to each other in neighborhoods because we were Japanese, and in another case, it may mean, “We know subtle differences among us because we are Japanese.” Furthermore, as stories are told and retold, the meanings of “Us, Japanese” are valorized and understood without detailed contextual explanations. At this point, the phrase, “Us, Japanese,” has become a communicative marker for the Japanese American elderly to (re)construct their ethnic identity by telling stories that signify specific meanings based on reflection and evaluation of their plantation experience. This is the constructive process of ethnic identity embedded in the phrase, “Us, Japanese,” into which the Japanese American elderly integrate the shared images of being Japanese and the common understandings of the meaning of those images.

“Working People”: Class Identity

My father kept working until he died. Doing shoemaking, he had to feed nine children. . . . We had many girls, and girls are good at washing clothes. That’s why we started laundry business. We had many girls, that’s why . . . In the meanwhile, when I was still fourth or fifth grade we had cane field, too. So, I used to work on the field weekends, yah. That’s why even I’m sewing something, I had to finish it soon, and I come home, change clothes, go to the cane field, and work until five o’clock. But I used to wish heavy rain so that I could go home, you know. I don’t want to work . . . you don’t blame.

Puna Sugar was structured by a rigid managerial hierarchy that overlapped with class differences between capitalists/entrepreneurs/administrators in Honolulu (the board of directors of Puna Sugar) and workers/employees on the plantation (manager, department superintendents, supervisors, skilled workers, and manual laborers). In terms of this hierarchy, residents of Puna plantation, including independent business owners in the towns, were working class people who were entirely dependent on the plantation economy.

Today, most Japanese American elderly are retired and live in their own houses. They manage their lives by themselves with Social Security benefits, pensions, and extra income, and say that they are well off in their present life. Reflecting this situation, the Japanese American elderly look back on their plantation lives and tell stories about hard working days at work, home, and school. In their stories, even though they do not use the term “working class,” they consider that they were once subordinated to Puna Sugar and were in the lower position in the socioeconomic system of Hawai’i. The Japanese American elderly share a belief in solidarity among working people and their families on the plantation and respect the values of physical labor. From this perspective, they express their plantation background and class identity as “working people,” and the phrase, “hard work,” with which they struggled for the betterment of their lives, has critical meaning in their stories.

Stories of hard working plantation people have three themes: 1) overcoming hardship and achieving their present living standard; 2) resistance to inequality in working conditions; and 3) escape from plantation work. Stories in each category illustrate how the Japanese American elderly “worked hard” to live through the poor living conditions that “everyone” experienced during the prewar period, and the pivotal point that penetrates their stories is pride and self-esteem in their “hard work.” Therefore, the meanings of their stories are dependent on their ideas about the value of hard work. In this section of the article, I review and analyze stories according to the three themes and discuss how the meanings of “hard work” come into play in constructing the class identity of the Japanese American elderly.

Hardship in making a living on the plantation in the prewar period is an important part of plantation stories. The Japanese American elderly illustrate their hardship by focusing on images of poor living conditions in which they had to deal with scarce economic resources, large families, and the inconvenience of transportation, communication, and infrastructure. Remembering that most people on the plantation were involved in raising sugarcane either as employees of Puna Sugar or as independent sugarcane growers, the Japanese American elderly invariably state that the sugar business in Puna was never
lucrative. For the employees, wages were lower than in other industries, and for independent sugarcane growers raising sugarcane was a risky business because they sometimes ended up in debt due to the fluctuation of sugar prices on the market. Meager cash income resulted in a lack of daily necessities, such as shoes, clothes and medicines, and in a plain diet based on rice and other food from the backyard—vegetables and occasional chicken or pork. Growing up in a big family is another issue that the Japanese American elderly talk about as part of their hardship. Whenever they recall their childhood, they associate their plantation experience with life in a big family in a small plantation house that consisted of parents and many siblings (sometimes including grandparents or in-laws). They depict their childhood as the days of “survival” with other family members, mainly their siblings, in terms of food, clothes, and privacy. The inconvenience of transportation, communication, and infrastructure on the plantation in the prewar period is also a point with which the Japanese American elderly sketch the images of poor plantation life. Long walks to school, sharing telephones and newspapers with neighbors, and having no electricity or sewer systems are commonly told in their stories. These are the pictures of their everyday life on the plantation that the Japanese American elderly draw and characterize as “poor,” in contrast to their current living standard.

The depiction of harsh living conditions is critical for the Japanese American elderly to illustrate their plantation lives because they accentuate their experiences of enduring hardship and achieving their present life in which they enjoy American material comforts. Also, by describing themselves as struggling by raising sugarcane under such circumstances, they point to the roots of their class identity as plantation-raised Japanese Americans and emphasize their respect for the value of “hard work” with which they grappled with school work, working careers, and homemaking and overcame the hardships of plantation life.

In their stories of overcoming hardship, the Japanese American elderly emphasize a sense of unity—the feeling that they are members of a group of “working people” who respect the value of work. They regard working people as those who worked outside the home for cash income as well as those who worked inside for the family. “Workers” for cash wages include employees of Puna Sugar, independent sugarcane growers, shopkeepers, business owners, school teachers, public servants, ranchers, farmers producing other crops than sugarcane, and those who wash and sew clothes.5 Workers for the family were mothers, grandmothers, and sisters who took care of all kinds of household chores and raised vegetables and livestock in the backyard. Children as students were also workers in the canefields on weekends and summer breaks. In their plantation stories, therefore, “everybody” strove for the betterment of their lives, and a focal point is a sense of unity through which they encouraged each other to deal with hardship. In a household, family members had strong ties to keep their lives going. In the community, Japanese had a number of institutional activities to improve their social life by nurturing a community spirit. “No one was rich, everyone was poor” is the phrase with which the Japanese American elderly describe plantation people in the prewar period. It signifies that they collectively remember their plantation experience as one in which “everyone” was struggling to live through everyday life, having a limited income and a big family. This shared image is a vital part of their collective memories of plantation life that is the basis of the class identity of the Japanese American elderly as “working people.”

When the Japanese American elderly reminisce and talk about their plantation lives, they plot stories by relating the experiences of “hard work” and the unity of “working people” who “work it out” together. In their stories, they emphasize their pride and self-esteem for reaching their present living standard that they attribute to their qualities as “hard workers” (e.g., perseverance, diligence, and respect for fellow workers). Thus, the words “work” and “hard worker” in their stories are critical for the Japanese American elderly to portray their qualities as plantation-raised Japanese Americans. For the Japanese American elderly, work is more than just a means of earning money; it is a way of living or a value of life. Saying that “Our entire life is work,” they stress the significance of work in their lives. Therefore, when they refer to someone as a “hard worker,” it is an expression of admiration and praise for the person who has spent a meaningful life. In their stories, the Japanese American elderly illustrate their image of themselves as hard workers who respect the value of work and conclude that they as a group attained their current socioeconomic status because they shared the qualities of hard workers. Their pride and self-esteem in their stories are thus not those of individuals but are rooted in their common understandings of the meaning of “work” and “hard worker.”

Looking at the present society in Hawai‘i in which the Japanese American elderly enjoy American democracy and equality among all ethnic groups, they remember the days of resistance to inequality in wages and benefits among workers. These are stories about the struggle for eliminating inequality based
on race that they blame on white domination of the plantation hierarchy. The distinction between Caucasians and non-Caucasians was the critical marker for the differentiation in working and living conditions until the ILWU won the 1946 strike. The Japanese American elderly often tell tales of the power relations between white luna (supervisors) and immigrant laborers in the canefields in the early plantation days before the 1920s, and indicate that the difference between Haole (white) as the boss and non-Haole as the subordinate was taken for granted under plantation paternalism until 1946. There was a clear racial hierarchy in social and economic structures on the sugar plantations in Hawai‘i (Takaki 1983). In their stories, the Japanese American elderly refer to themselves as “Us, workers” in contrast to Haole as bosses, and this distinction is projected onto not only occupational status but also political affiliation (Haole as Republicans and workers as Democrats) and educational achievement (Haole as college graduates and workers as high school graduates or less). The phrase, “Us, workers,” therefore represents racial, occupational and political differences between Haole and non-Haole that the Japanese American elderly believe differentiate working and living statuses in Puna Sugar.

The class identity of the Japanese American elderly is inseparable from their stories about discriminatory working conditions, union activities, and sugar strikes. These stories are about resistance to the plantation hierarchy ruled by Haole companies. Focal points are Puna Sugar’s unfair treatment of non-Haole workers and the victory of the 1946 sugar strike accomplished by the solidarity of the multiethnic labor union, the ILWU. The Japanese American elderly recall the Haole management of the plantation in which non-Haole workers were subordinated to Haole in terms of wages (lower pay for the same job), benefits (smaller plantation house), and working conditions (longer working hours). With the phrase, “Haole is the ruler,” the Japanese American elderly express their vulnerable positions at Puna Sugar, attributing inequality to racial hierarchy in the sugar industry. When an ILWU representative came to assist with union activities in 1944, non-Haole workers at Puna Sugar organized their own local unit and joined the 1946 strike with the ILWU, winning fair labor contracts for better working conditions. In this story, the Japanese American elderly emphasize the solidarity of union members, such as Japanese, Filipinos and Portuguese, and depict how “Us, workers” were able to win the strike by working together in soup kitchens, fundraising, picketing, and negotiations with Puna Sugar. Stories about the company’s discriminatory treatment and the victory of the 1946 strike, therefore, illustrate the plantation lives of non-Haole working people and their resistance to racial inequality, and the phrase, “Us, workers,” conveys particular meanings that express their solidarity on the plantation.

The class identity of the Japanese American elderly is also evident in stories of how they escaped from physical labor in the canefield as they reached the age of entering full-time work. Growing up in the plantation community in which “everyone” was struggling to make a living by raising sugarcane, the Japanese American elderly (men in particular) desired upward mobility and strove to escape from work in the fields because they knew of its difficulty from the experience of helping their parents in their home fields, working for Puna Sugar in the summer, and belonging to the Future Farmers of America at school. In addition to hard labor, the low wages of the sugar industry also discouraged them. When the Japanese American elderly tell this sort of stories, they invariably state they thought that education was the key to having a better job, otherwise they had little chance to acquire the skills or qualifications for it. Therefore, most Japanese American elderly, both women and men born after the 1920s, went to high school to learn job skills, such as carpentry, accounting, chemistry, and welding, and found employment other than manual labor on the plantation. Some women attended vocational school after high school to learn dressmaking, nursing and typing and had specialized jobs, while a few women earned a bachelor’s degree and became school teachers. Besides education, the majority of men joined the Army or Navy, either through the draft or by volunteering. After serving for a couple of years, they acquired vocational skills and GI Bill benefits and either worked for private companies or attended a university to earn a degree. In addition to those who had specialized jobs at Puna Sugar or who left the plantation to pursue careers, there were others who found ways to become businessmen, shopkeepers, and farmers who planted more profitable crops than sugarcane such as papayas, tangerines, and flowers in Puna.

The point of the stories of escaping from raising sugarcane lies in the determination expressed to avoid becoming plantation laborers. In other words, even though the Japanese American elderly were taught to work hard to make their way in life by their parents and grandparents, they worked hard so that they would not have to work as manual laborers in the canefield like their parents and grandparents. On the one hand, as plantation-raised Japanese Americans, they respected their parents’ and grandparents’ perseverance and diligence as sugar workers and incorporated their work ethic into their
lives. On the other hand, seeing that their parents and grandparents were inescapably tied to the plantation, at which the Japanese American elderly frowned because of its hardship and scant reward, they considered sugar workers to be at the bottom of the socioeconomic structure in Hawai'i and detested the thought of staying in the same position. This dual view toward plantation laborers and raising sugarcane fueled their desire and efforts for upward mobility when they entered full-time work, and after retirement the Japanese American elderly recalled this view as a significant part of their plantation experience. This perspective reflects the class identity of the Japanese American elderly in terms of their past low socioeconomic position in Hawai'i and their aspirations for better jobs in their youth.

Characterizing the values of “hard work” as patience, diligence, and physical strength for supporting family and community as well as for upward mobility, the Japanese American elderly regard “being hard workers” as the primary quality of plantation-raised Japanese Americans and as the foundation of their class identity. Also, by connecting being hard workers to the “solidarity” of non-Haole on the plantation, they find their class identity as working people in the labor movement against the racial hierarchy of the sugar industry in Hawai'i. The Japanese American elderly, believing that their hard work has now “paid off” after all these years, express pride and self-esteem in having overcome the adversity of plantation life. In their stories, their class identity as “working people” is therefore, inseparably connected to and represented by their plantation origins and non-Haole status.

“Our Days”: Generational Identity

The certain cultural aspects, yah, I regret that people are losing it. I believe in traditions, you know, I believe strongly in tradition. The certain tradition, the certain part of Japanese culture we can do without, yah? But, you show respect to a person or to our ancestors, I think this kind of tradition we should maintain.

We still have canefield, my mother gave it to me. My father and mother gave it to me and told me, "Era katu (It was hard) to buy that land. Keep it Miyatake’s name." They gave it to me to keep it Miyatake’s name, and it’s still there. Nothing there, and people want to lease it for raising papayas, but I don’t... I respect my parents. I’ll keep it Miyatake’s name.

The Japanese American elderly are Nisei or Sansai—the second or third generation of Japanese Americans. However, I do not use these conventional terms to identify them because they include Nisei, “Nisei-han,” and some Sansai. Considering that the Nisei who were born by the early 1920s had reached marriageable age in the 1930s, it is conceivable that the Japanese American elderly include some Sansai. During fieldwork, I met and talked to Nisei, Nisei-han, and Sansai Japanese American elderly. Due to this complexity of the generational profile of the Japanese American elderly, it is not accurate to specify them only as Nisei.

Remembering the prewar and postwar periods and after Puna Sugar closed down in 1984, the Japanese American elderly tell stories about transitions in their lives and in the physical and socioeconomic environment in Puna. In their stories referring to “plantation days” as “our days,” they illustrate the latter with a myriad of episodes in which they compare and contrast themselves to the Issei, and the present Japanese community to that in the past. In both cases, they accentuate their generational characteristics with their distinctive cultural background based on both “Japanese” and “American” ways they had acquired from the Issei and American education and social life.

While the Japanese American elderly recall and explicate how the Issei had an influence on them in shaping their “Japanese” perspective, they emphasize that they have their own worldview as Americans. Their stories commonly touch upon “Japanese” customs and practices from homemaking to religious activities that the Issei followed in the home, the “Japanese” style of leadership with which they transformed a group of Japanese immigrants into a community, and “Japanese” moral values that the Issei (e.g., parents, grandparents, and Japanese language school teachers) taught the Japanese American elderly. While these stories portray the shared image of the Issei and common understandings of “Japanese” culture among the Japanese American elderly, they also indicate that the experiences of interacting with the Issei are not always appreciated by them. Whether or not the Japanese American elderly respect these “Japanese” traditions is dependent on the individual, and no Japanese American elderly accepts them unconditionally. In their stories, the Japanese American elderly express that there is an irreconcilable gap between themselves and the Issei by saying that the latter are from a different world and follow different ways of thinking and doing things than American ways. These differences from the Issei are a significant premise for the Japanese American elderly as they construct their generational identity in their stories.

While the Japanese American elderly view the Issei from an “American” perspective and emphasize their cultural differences, they never close their eyes.
to their “Japanese” background when they tell stories of “our days.” In other words, they always evaluate their plantation experiences by conjoining what they call “Japanese” and “American” cultural values. The Japanese American elderly state that their values are influenced by American “modern/liberal” beliefs as well as by Japanese “traditional” ideas and practices. Sometimes they respect Japanese “traditions” and refute American “liberalism,” while other times they criticize Japanese “old” ways and follow American “modern” ways. Nevertheless, in either case, they do not totally reject the other set of cultural values but try to be eclectic, choosing desirable qualities from each set of values. Therefore, the stories of the Japanese American elderly are told not from a clear-cut cultural perspective of either “Japanese” or “American” but from the fusion of these two different viewpoints. Their dual perspectives are a distinctive generational aspect of the Japanese American elderly observable in their stories.

When the Japanese American elderly tell stories about plantation life, dual perspectives play a critical role in representing “our days.” In their stories, they invariably feature the liveliness and closeness of the Japanese community that the Issei established with the “Japanese” style of interpersonal relationships. Also, they highlight Issei wisdom in dealing with poverty and inconvenience in plantation life and Issei hard work and perseverance in overcoming hardship in the prewar period. For the Japanese American elderly, this representation of “our days” is not just a description of what they experienced back then, but also a meaningful interpretation of their past lives in terms of how they became familiar with a “Japanese” style of social life, everyday practices, and diligence through a “Japanese” perspective that they still maintain. In other words, the collective memories of their plantation lives are remembered inseparably from “things about Japanese” that they learned from the Issei through a “Japanese” perspective. On the other hand, their interpretation of their collective memories of “our days” is simultaneously rooted in reflection on their current socioeconomic status through the eyes of Americans whose backgrounds lie in an American education and lifestyle. The Japanese American elderly evaluate their past plantation experience from an American viewpoint and draw the image of “our days” by contrasting the “American” with the “Japanese.” They emphasize “Japanese” in characterizing their plantation lives and in accentuating the distinctiveness of “our days” because they see their past lives through their present “American” perspective. Therefore, their interpretation of “our days” based on dual perspectives reflects their generational identity.

In telling stories about community life, the Japanese American elderly look back on transitions in Puna and contrast the present decline of the community (“nowadays”) to its past prosperity that they remember enjoying as the largest ethnic group on the plantation (“our days”). They express a feeling of loss of the familiar sights of towns and camps and of the liveliness of the Japanese community. In terms of physical changes, they describe how the cane fields have been abandoned or turned into new subdivisions, plantation camps and towns have been razed, and historical buildings, such as the plantation manager’s residence, the mill, and the warehouse, are desolate. As for the community’s population, while the Issei all have passed away, most of the children of the Japanese American elderly have left Puna for jobs in urban areas such as Hilo and cities on O’ahu or the U.S. continent. Many of the former plantation residents also have moved out of Puna due to land development. Meanwhile, existing plantation camps have been taken over by mainly recent immigrants from the Philippines, and new subdivisions are occupied by outsiders from Hilo, Honolulu, and the U.S. continent at affordable property prices. The outflow of the Japanese American population has resulted in the disappearance of Japanese camps and towns in Puna, such as those in Kea’au, Pāhoa, Kapoho, Kurtistown, and Mountain View, all once booming with Japanese stores, shops, and theaters with Japanese customers. All Japanese language schools were also forced to shut down due to the lack of students, and Buddhist and Christian churches have been suffering significant attrition in their congregations. Bon dance, which is the most popular local annual festival, has been continually downsized for the last four decades.

The Japanese American elderly, still holding a sense of belonging to the Japanese community that once maintained a vigorous community spirit, draw the image of the “good old” plantation days from their collective memories. By relating their experiences of growing up in the close-knit Japanese community, they delineate “our days” and lay out the basis for their identity as plantation-raised Japanese. In this construction, the image of the “good old” plantation days has two key points by which the Japanese American elderly understand the meanings of “our days.” The first point lies in the characterization of the plantation days as “good” and “old.” They are “good” because the Japanese American elderly look back on their plantation lives from the viewpoint of their present living standard; they are “happy” to remember overcoming the poor and inconvenient plantation conditions. The plantation days are “old” because the liveliness and closeness of the Japanese community are almost invisible in Puna today and because the Japanese American elderly now feel
their own time is coming to an end. Therefore, the image of the “good old” plantation days is a reflection of the current lives of the Japanese American elderly, leading “our days” to signify the loss of “Japanese community life” in their present lives. As for the second point, the image of the “good old” days renders a sense of “home” for the Japanese American elderly insofar as they were born and brought up in the plantation community; they find the basis of their identity as plantation-raised Japanese Americans in the collective memories of their plantation lives. A sense of home gives a critical meaning to “our days” that stands for their generational identity, distinguishing them from others such as the Issei and the younger generations. When these two aspects of the image of the “good old” plantation days—the loss of Japanese community life and a sense of home—fuse into the meanings of “our days,” the stories of “our days” bring out emotional spurts of nostalgia and sentimentalism among the Japanese American elderly by stirring up memories of interpersonal relationships with people whom they knew in the past and of a fellowship with those who share the experience of growing up on the plantation as Japanese. This revitalization of the “good old” plantation days with emotional evocation in telling stories of “our days” is the process by which the Japanese American elderly construct their generational identity.

Conclusion

Construction of the multiplicity of the collective identities of the Japanese American elderly is based on what they remember—the collective memories of their plantation lives in Puna and past occurrences in Hawai‘i—and on the context in which they remember—consideration of the present local and national situations surrounding them. In the case of their ethnic identity, the Japanese American elderly reflect on not only the past image of the Japanese community in Puna as “Us, Japanese,” but also on the “history” of Japanese immigrants and Japanese American society in Hawai‘i throughout the prewar, wartime and postwar periods. The current relatively high socioeconomic status of Japanese Americans in Hawai‘i is particularly important for the Japanese American elderly in viewing their ethnic identity in comparison to other ethnic groups. As for their class identity, the Japanese American elderly emphasize their lives as “working people” on the plantation as well as economic and political structures in Hawai‘i and the United States that encompass the issues of capitalism then and now (e.g., the Big Five companies, Haole domination, and the downfall of King Sugar and the sugar industry in the world economy). Regarding their generational identity, the Japanese American elderly look back on transitions in the physical environment and community life in Puna and contrast the “modern American” society with the “old Japanese” plantation community. Thus, the multiplicity of the collective identities of the Japanese American elderly indicates that they situationally define the boundaries of their identities according to geographic, economic, political, cultural, and social circumstances.

The Japanese American elderly tell (and listen to) plantation stories. As I have demonstrated, their stories are a representation of their collective identities that interweaves ethnic, class and generational identities into their “peoplehood” as plantation-raised Japanese Americans. Crafting and imposing specific meanings on certain phrases such as “Us, Japanese,” “hard work,” and “our days” in telling their stories of their past plantation lives, the Japanese American elderly construct shared understandings of values and qualities that they believe are their own characteristics that distinguish “us” from “them.” Telling stories is, therefore, a process of constructing collective identities, revealing both internally-oriented emotional manifestations and externally-based shared understandings of who they are. For the Japanese American elderly, “good” stories articulate their peoplehood with emotional evocation. From my analysis, I conclude that telling plantation stories among the Japanese American elderly is a cultural process in which they determine what experiences are remembered or silenced, what meanings are attached to the remembered experiences, and in what social contexts the experiences are presented. When “good” stories penetrate into the communicative circle of the Japanese American elderly by being told and retold, the stories are no longer just personal anecdotes but a representation of the collective identities of plantation-raised Japanese Americans.

Notes

1. In this text I use the term “Japanese” interchangeably with “Japanese American.” I refer to Japanese nationals as Issei or Japanese immigrants who came to the U.S. before the 1924 Immigration Act ended Japanese immigration.
2. Whether or not the strict discipline is appreciated is dependent on the individual.
3. For example, there was a critical gap between Uchinanchu (Okinawans) and Naichi (mainland Japanese).
4. However, the Japanese American elderly with Okinawan ancestry see the differences between them and Naichi as more than cultural.
In Retrospect:
Second-Generation Japanese Americans in Hawai‘i

EILEEN H. TAMURA

Until the 1990s, Japanese Americans were one of the most written-about of the Asian American groups both in Hawai‘i and the continental United States. The concentration of studies on Japanese Americans reflects the history of Asian America. From 1910 to 1970, the Nikkei (ethnic Japanese living outside Japan) were the most numerous among Asian Americans in the United States. In 1940, for example, they constituted 51 percent of Asian Americans living on the U.S. continent and 64 percent of those in Hawai‘i (Montero 1980:7; Lind 1967:28).

Moreover, the bulk of immigrants from Japan arrived during a period of four decades, from 1885 to 1924, and most of their children—the Nisei—were born from 1900 through the 1930s. Because of these two discrete periods, first of immigration and then of births, the Nikkei were ripe subjects for studies of generational change.

In this essay I reflect back on the reasons for my research on the Nisei, on aspects of their experiences as youths and some of their achievements as adults, and on critiques of the Nisei in light of their dominance in Hawai‘i during the latter decades of the twentieth century.

As a Sansei, a third-generation Japanese American, I was highly critical of my parents’ generation. In 1966–67, as a University of Hawai‘i undergraduate who was influenced by the writings of New Left activists, I stood in silent vigil with like-minded students and faculty in the heart of the campus at Varney Circle in protest against the war in Vietnam. Little did I know then that the next couple of years would witness a ground swell of sit-ins and demonstrations that would rock campus life (see, e.g., Evinger 1968; Hoyt 1968; “UH Sit-in” 1968; “Blaze Was Set” 1968; “Student Group” 1969). By then I had graduated from the university and departed from the islands, heeding the call...
of President John F. Kennedy to join the Peace Corps. During the next eight
years, I lived in Senegal, West Africa, followed by sojourns in Japan and the
continental United States.

Meanwhile the Civil Rights, anti-Vietnam War, and Black Power
movements that had been challenging the prevailing authority of political
leaders and community institutions encouraged other forms of protest. On the
continent, the Native American, La Raza (Chicano), and Asian American
movements took root (Wei 1993:1–43; Takahashi 1997:160). In Hawai‘i in
the 1970s, the Waiahole-Waikane land use protests and the Native Hawaiian
political activism and cultural renaissance emerged (Nakata 1999; McGregor-
Alegado 1980; Trask 1987; Kanahele 1982). It was in this context of upheaval
and critique that I rejected the Nisei, viewing them as symbols of political
conservatism.

From comments that I received after the publication of my book,
Americanization, Acculturation, and Nisei Identity: The Nisei Generation in
Hawai‘i (Tamura 1994), I realized that a number of readers assumed that I had
originally set out to study the Nisei. Nothing could be further from the truth.
Because of my political stance, I was uninterested in research on them.

Instead, as an educator, I sought to examine an aspect of education in the
history of Hawai‘i. I chose the decades before World War II, when the islands
were a territory of the United States, because little had been written on
education in Hawai‘i during this period. Furthermore, in my research I sought
to place events in Hawai‘i within the larger American context. As a student of
American history, I was interested in exploring the extent to which the
Territory of Hawai‘i was an “American” place. And finally, my interest in social
history led me to position the lives and actions of ordinary people in the
foreground, while placing in the background the lives of the political and
economic elite.

With these three areas of interest in mind—history of education,
American history, and social history—I immersed myself in the scholarly
literature on early twentieth century Hawai‘i. What I soon learned was that my
intent to study ordinary people meant that I would study the Nikkei, who
made up a substantial proportion of the islands’ population. In 1920, for
example, they constituted almost half (43 percent) of the people in Hawai‘i
(Lind 1967:28). At the same time, as I delved further into this period, I became
increasingly interested in learning more about the Nisei.

They were the children of Issei, Japanese immigrants, who were among
thousands from all parts of the world answering the call in the late nineteenth
and early twentieth centuries for workers for the islands’ rapidly expanding
sugar cane industry. About 400,000 immigrants arrived in Hawai‘i, half of
whom remained in the islands (Lind 1967:8; Beecher 1985:146). About
180,000 of those who arrived were Japanese. As with other immigrants to
Hawai‘i, more than half left the islands, either returning to their homeland or
moving to the U.S. west coast (Tamura 1994:27). This birds-of-passage
phenomenon was not unique to Hawai‘i. On the mainland United States,
substantial proportions of southeastern Europeans who flocked to the cities
to work in booming industries later returned to their homelands (Archdeacon

Most Issei men ventured to Hawai‘i from 1885 to 1908, and most Issei
women arrived from 1900 to 1924. As a result, most of their children, the
Nisei, grew up during the first four decades of the twentieth century when
Hawai‘i was an American territory. This American territory in which the Nisei
grew up was dominated by a small minority of haole—European Americans—
who constituted in 1920 only 7.7 percent of the population (Lind 1967:28).
They stood at the top of the socioeconomic pyramid as sugar plantation
managers, businessmen, and government officials. Under them was a small but
growing middle class, largely haole but increasingly non-white, of craftsmen,
small-business people, and teachers. At the bottom was the mass of primarily
Asian laborers, most of whom worked in the sugar plantation fields and mills
(Glick 1980:67; Fuchs 1961:37).

Despite this semi-colonial setting and distance from the American
mainland, the territory kept somewhat abreast of developments in the rest of
the country. While not as closely connected then as the nation is today,
nonetheless the islands’ territorial leaders were in touch with ideas from the
continental United States. Thus the Americanization movement, which
engulfed the continent during and immediately after World War I, also
reached the shores of these Pacific islands.

The Americanization movement on the continental United States was an
organized effort by long-time Americans to maintain national cohesion and
dominance of Anglo-American ways amidst the mass influx of southeastern
European immigrants during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
To this end the movement sought to have the millions of newcomers discard
their “foreign” practices and replace them with so-called American ways.
Among other things, it meant that immigrants should speak and write English, attend classes in American civics and history, and demonstrate their patriotism to the United States. At the same time, it expected that most of these immigrants and their children would continue to fill the factory jobs that had expanded during the industrial revolution (Hartman 1948:7–8, 64, 105–7, 267–9; Higham 1969:236–37; Gordon 1964:98–99).

A major difference between the Americanization movement on the continent and its manifestation in Hawai’i was the people on whom the movement was focused. On the continent, Americanizers aimed their efforts on the largest group of immigrants there, the millions from southern and eastern Europe—from places such as Italy and Austria-Hungary. On the other hand, the immigrants targeted in Hawai’i were the Japanese, the most numerous and therefore the most conspicuous group there. Thus while the rhetoric in Hawai’i echoed that on the continent, racial overtones gave the movement in the territory a distinctive twist.

At the same time, during the first two decades of the twentieth century, the influx of Japanese immigrants into the U.S. west coast brought a ground swell of anti-Japanese fervor that interacted with anti-Japanese sentiments in Hawai’i. In response Congress passed the 1924 immigration act, which effectively shut the doors to the Japanese (Ichioka 1988:176–254). (The doors had previously been closed to other Asians such as the Chinese [Daniels 1988:149]).

As mentioned earlier, the end of Japanese immigration resulted in two relatively distinct generations: the Issei, composed of immigrants who arrived from 1885 to 1924, and the Nisei, the children born from about 1900 through the 1930s. As the Nisei grew up during the decades before World War II, they strove to make a place for themselves in the larger society that they encountered in the islands. To this end many sought an American education so that they could move off the plantation. Problems arose when their ideas of their future lives conflicted with the ideas of those who wanted them to remain as plantation workers.

Many Nisei saw American schooling as an opportunity that would help them achieve their goal of entering middle-class life. The story of Kazuo (a pseudonym), born in 1902, illustrates certain experiences common to other Nisei. His immigrant parents began their lives in Hawai’i as plantation workers on the island of Kaua’i. After a few years, they left plantation work, moving to the town of Waimea in another part of the island, where they leased some land and grew vegetables. Kazuo was one of eight children and, when he was eight years old, he began school. In an anonymous essay he wrote when he was a 25-year-old student at the University of Hawai’i, he recalled, "I found that the town folk were dressed better than I, and they knew better English and knew more about the world than I. So, in the class, the town children . . . progressed more rapidly in their studies . . . " Frustrated, he often thought that "it was hopeless to go to school" (Smith 1927:R1H3).

In Waimea, Kazuo attended both the American school and a Japanese language school. "While in the lower grades I liked Japanese school more than the English school, but when I was in the higher grades, my attitude changed completely, due to the magazines I read in the school library. I read about the highly paid positions open to trained men and women. After considering which profession to select, I decided to become a doctor" (Smith 1927:R1H3). Kazuo’s comments reflect some of the effects of attending the American school as well as his high aspirations.

"With the desire to become a doctor," he later noted, "I put my whole thought into my studies, and I was able to progress very rapidly." When he reached the seventh grade, he moved to Honolulu to attend Royal School and, upon graduation there, enrolled in 1919 at McKinley High School, the only public high school on O‘ahu. In Honolulu, like many other Nisei, Kazuo worked as a houseboy for a family. He recalled,

\[\text{To work part time while attending school was a hard thing to do, but, when one really needs an education, he'll get it in any means that is possible. When I was going to high school, I had to wake up at four o'clock in the morning to do my work. I polished the car, watered the plants and then prepared breakfast. After the meal, the dishes were washed, wiped and put away in order; then I walked to school. In the afternoon, I started work at 2:30 P.M. I did yard work until 5:30 P.M. and after getting dressed up. I prepared the evening meal. I got through with my night's work, usually, between 8:00 and 9:30 P.M. so when I commenced to do my study, it was sometimes near 10:00 P.M. After which I studied till late in the night: 1:00 A.M. was the usual hour for me to get into bed. . . . }\]

"[But] in spite of the long hours of work, and the short hours of sleep and study. . . I was for two consecutive years on the honor-roll at the McKinley High School (Smith 1927:R1H3).

Despite his efforts, Kazuo may not have realized his dream of becoming a doctor. He wrote his essay in his senior year at the university, at which time he was uncertain if he would be able to afford medical school.
Kazu’s story illuminates the experiences of many Nisei as they grew up in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Like other Nisei, Kazuo began school late and felt disadvantaged in school because of his rural upbringing and lack of general knowledge and English-language ability. Like other Nisei, he first preferred Japanese language school, but later changed his mind when he realized the advantages of excelling in “English school.” And like other Nisei, he worked his way through high school to pursue a long-term goal.

For many of those like Kazuo, who attended high school before World War II, working their way through school meant earning all, most, or some of their school expenses. Some worked part-time on sugar and pineapple plantations or family coffee farms. Others worked in pineapple canneries, retail stores, small hotels, and laundries. Still others worked as carpenters, mechanics, maids, house boys, or yard boys.

In continuing their education, however, Kazuo and other Nisei who attended high school were among a minority. Most Nisei who grew up during the 1910s and 1920s did not go beyond the eighth grade (Tamura 1994:100). In 1919 each of the four major islands had only one high school, and it was located in a town: McKinley High in Honolulu, established in 1896; Hilo High in Hilo, established in 1905; Maui High and Grammar in Hamakua Poko, established in 1913; and Kaua‘i High and Grammar in Lihu‘e, established in 1914 (U.S. Department of the Interior 1920:212). In order to attend high school, rural youths had to move out of their family homes and find places to live in town—even in dormitories or with families.

This meant boarding costs. In addition, there were high school expenses such as school fees and book purchases. Furthermore, attending high school meant that the youth’s family would lose a potential source of income. The financial cost of further education thus led many Nisei youths to drop out of school and instead find jobs in order to help their families make ends meet.

Gradually, however, as their Issei parents became more secure financially, more and more Nisei were able to continue their schooling. In addition, older adult siblings often helped pay for their younger siblings’ school expenses. At the same time, in the mid-1920s and 1930s, the territorial government began building junior and senior high schools in rural districts. This made it easier for youths to attend secondary schools. As a result, while few attended high school in the 1910s, doing so was more common by the 1940s (Tamura 1994:107).

But while many Nisei sought a high school and perhaps a college education, there were others who rejected further schooling. Many believed that continuing in school was unnecessary in finding a decent job. Moreover, the obstacles could be a discouragement. One Nisei recalled that going beyond the sixth grade meant traveling by train to a neighboring town. This was something he refused to do (personal communication, 10 July 1989). Still others were simply uninterested in further schooling. Teiki Yoshimoto, who dropped out of McKinley High School in the 1920s, remembered his days of truancy with his friends. “I used to be crazy for movie,” he said. “The show start at 10 [o’clock], see. Go into Hawaii Theater till about twelve o’clock. Finish that, go across the street, Empire Theater. And then, finish about two o’clock. Then we start walking, going back” (Yoshimoto 1985:308–309). Another Nisei, Masayuki Yoshimura, grew up in the 1920s and 30s in Waikiki, where he enjoyed surfing and having a good time. “School was very important to [our parents],” he later noted. “So, after I graduate high school, my dad wanted to send me to USC [University of Southern California], see. But I wasn’t interested” (Yoshimura 1985:1475–79).

Yet even those who did not attend high school sought jobs that would give them a better life than plantation work did. By 1940, when many Nisei had reached adulthood, Issei and Nisei men had advanced significantly as small businessmen, managers, salesmen, clerks, and craftsmen. In contrast, Issei and Nisei women were underrepresented in these jobs. Most Nikkei women instead found work as domestic servants, farm workers, and unpaid family farmers and shopkeepers (Tamura 1994:217–18).

After World War II, when younger Nisei men and women were able to continue their schooling, some Nisei men entered professions like medicine and especially dentistry, while Nisei men and women became teachers, and Nisei women found jobs as nurses, secretaries, and sales clerks (Tamura 1994:224–34). But before these later-born Nisei could further their schooling, World War II interrupted their lives. Much has been written about the experiences and achievements of Nisei men during the war, describing the ways in which they fought and served with distinction in Europe and in Asia (e.g., Murphy 1954; Duus 1987; Crost 1994).

After the war, having seen life away from the islands and invigorated with new confidence in themselves, Nisei veterans returned to Hawai‘i with a desire to change their status as second-class citizens. While haole Republicans had controlled political and economic life during the first five decades of the
twenty-first century, the watershed election of 1954 saw a victorious Democratic Party wrest political control of the territorial legislature. Once in power, the Democrats, many of whom were Nisei, enacted reforms in education, labor, health care, and land use laws, all of which benefited average families in Hawai‘i. At the same time, in their effort to enjoy the fruits of American capitalism and with the idea of spreading the wealth among a wider segment of the population, a number of Nisei, like others in the post-World War II economic boom in the islands, decided to partner with Republican landowners in a building frenzy that saw intense land development. As a result, land—that in the years before World War II had been under the control of large private landowners, predominantly haole Republicans—was in the decades after the war in the hands of both the same landed elite and the new power holders in the Democratic Party (Cooper and Daws 1985:3–7).

As the preceding discussion indicates, the Nisei sought not to change the economic and social system in Hawai‘i, but to fit into it. They believed in the American way of life; instead of challenging the American system, they played by its rules. Theirs was the common immigrant story of striving amidst hardship and of gradual success and achievement in the larger society. In this way, the contours of the Nisei experience in Hawai‘i were like those of other immigrants and their children—past and present. In Hawai‘i, however, the reduced but still relatively large proportion of Nikkei in the population—28 percent in 1970, in contrast to 4 percent Chinese and 1 percent Korean (Schmitt 1977:27)—made them highly visible in occupations such as teaching, in politics, and in other avenues of life.

Because of their postwar economic and political success, the Nisei and their descendants have been regarded as part of the islands’ late twentieth-century power elite. Viewed as part of the “establishment,” the once-outsiders-turned-insiders have become objects of both glorification and resentment. Glorification has come especially from newspaper articles and television newscasts that highlight Nisei feats of heroism during World War II. This media saturation has produced a backlash of sorts, a feeling of resentment among veterans of other ethnic groups, and a growing hostility toward a group that has been seen as part of the power structure in Hawai‘i.

It was in this context that Cindy Kobayashi Mackey, a Sansei, asserted in an interview with the Japanese American biweekly Hawaii Herald (Santoki 1995a, 1995b) that she objected to the myth of heroism and selflessness that had been perpetuated, she said, in the literature on the Nisei. “I think that there is a romantic notion attached with [the Nisei] past that is not good,” she said, “because it prevents us from talking about things in a more reflective way” (Santoki 1995a:A1). In her recently completed Ph.D. dissertation, “Out of Rebellion: The Politics of Identity and the Japanese in Hawai‘i,” Mackey attempted “to open up another dimension to the historical narrative of the Japanese in Hawai‘i” (Mackey 1995:ix).

Because her critique focused on an ethnic group with a long history of achievements in the community, she touched the sensitivities of Nisei supporters, and because her research and writing lacked depth, her interview caused an uproar in the Japanese American community (Kakesako 1995; Lind and Kakesako 1995). In a letter to the Hawaii Herald, author and veteran Ron Oba noted that for “four decades the veterans remained quiet [about their war experiences] . . . Only recently, at the urging of the more far-sighted members, have the vets begun to open up . . . If this opening-up is offensive to you, so be it” (Oba 1995:A7). Oba was only one of many who responded in writing to the Mackey interview (see Hawaii Herald 1995). The resulting controversy over Mackey’s interview with the Hawaii Herald even led to a panel discussion of her dissertation at the March 1996 Association for Asian American Studies Regional Conference in Honolulu.

In her research on the Nikkei in Hawai‘i, Mackey grappled with the contrast between her idealized image of Japanese Americans and what she read about them in scholarly works. For example, she had thought of them as “quiet and effective” (Mackey 1995:9), but then read about Japanese immigrants rebelling against poor plantation conditions. Moreover, the stories she read sometimes contradicted each other, and some of the things she read fell short of heroism.

While agreeing with Mackey that an AJA myth existed, a letter-to-the-editor from Michael Sawamoto said that “Mackey’s naïveté and apparent shock and disillusionment at finding rebellious isseis and niseis” was “amusing and tragic. The history has always been there for the reading,” Sawamoto noted. “The struggles on the plantations: the strikes, unionization, the rebellions, the hunger, the hard work and the death; all are there for anyone willing to take the time to look or ask. One must know all of the history to redefine it” (Sawamoto 1995:A6).

Mackey (1995:170–71) deplored the prevailing construct of the Nisei as hero, created, she said, by scholars and other writers such as Harry Kitano
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(1969), Thelma Chang (1991), Masayo Duus (1987), and Chester Tanaka (1982). Unfortunately, Mackey’s sweeping criticism of the studies on Japanese Americans failed to take into account the ones that had forced her to rethink her earlier idealization of the Nisei. As a result, her portrayal of the literature on the Nikkei in Hawai‘i was oversimplified.

Although receiving less popular attention than the popular press, studies that went beyond a celebration of the Nikkei were readily available at libraries and bookstores. There were, for example, an early study of racism among Japanese in Hawai‘i (Masuoka 1939); essays on prostitution among Issei plantation workers (Hori 1981) and on Naichi racism toward Okinawans (Toyama and Ikeda 1950; Ige 1981); a book on the effort to achieve money, land, and power (Cooper and Daws 1985); and discussions of gambling and prostitution among the Issei, racist attitudes toward Burakumin, Okinawans, and Filipinos, and alcoholism, wife-beating, and alienation within the family (Tamura 1994).

I discuss Mackey’s study because her pre-research notions contrasted so sharply with mine. Taken together, our differing frames of reference point to the highly personal nature of research. All of us approach a subject from the perspective of our own experiences. While Mackey had idealized the Nisei, I had dismissed them as too conservative. Our contrasting pre-research images further indicate the diversity within the Japanese American experience. Although people of an ethnic group are often seen by others as a monolithic entity, they are often more different than similar—in their family lives, social environments, experiences, and personalities. And this holds true even if they are of the same generation.

I discuss Mackey’s study for yet another reason. Despite its shortcomings—a rhetorical style that distracted the reader from her ideas, the unfortunate use of straw men, and the sweeping generalizations—Mackey’s critique of the popular narrative that lauds the Nisei as courageous war heroes, hardworking and selfless, points to the need for more complex and nuanced images that show people as multi-dimensional human beings with failings as well as strengths.

The uproar over Mackey’s statements eventually subsided, but several years later, two other Japanese American women initiated another public dispute. In an essay published by the Honolulu Advertiser, Ida Yoshinaga and Eiko Kosasa (2000a) castigated the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) Honolulu chapter president Clayton Ihei for his letter (later published in the Hawaii Herald) to Native Hawaiian activist Millitali Trask. Ihei (1999: A7) had objected to Trask’s “racial/ethnic remarks” and “personal attacks” on U.S. Senator Daniel Inouye. Yoshinaga and Kosasa, representing the Local Japanese Women for Justice (LJWJ), interpreted this objection as “condemning” Trask because she disagreed with “Inouye’s views on sovereignty” (Yoshinaga and Kosasa 2000a). They, in turn, applauded Trask for standing up to the powerful Senator, something, they noted, too few people were willing to do. In response, two other officers of the JACL, David Forman and William Hoshijo (2000), wrote a public response that pointed to inaccuracies in the Yoshinaga-Kosasa piece, defended actions taken by the JACL of Honolulu, and invited the LJWJ to air their views with the JACL board of directors.

That Yoshinaga and Kosasa were willing to take on the powerful Nisei Senator and World War II veteran was an act of courage. They also correctly criticized the media for sensationalizing Trask’s remarks while ignoring the substance of her complaint against Inouye, that he was undermining attempts by Native Hawaiians to determine for themselves the process toward their own sovereignty. Moreover, Yoshinaga and Kosasa rightly noted that the JACL did not ask for Trask’s side of the story before speaking out. On the other hand, because they misrepresented key elements of Ihei’s letter in their rush to defend Trask, Yoshinaga and Kosasa obscured the common ground they shared with the JACL, or at least with a number of its members.

The dispute between the LJWJ and the JACL highlights a question that both were grappling with: In light of their history as a group that once experienced discrimination and later achieved positions of power and influence, how should the Nikkei deal with present-day issues of civil rights and indigenous rights? The Hawai‘i JACL and later the national JACL, for example, formally supported the Hawaiian sovereignty movement (Castanha 1996). Nevertheless the LJWJ has stood to the left of the JACL. Both groups, concerned about injustices, have been working toward similar, but not identical, goals. Can they come together? Should they?

Following this dispute, a special issue appeared in 2000 of Amerasia Journal entitled Whose Vision: Asian Settler Colonialism in Hawai‘i. Several essays included in the issue were based on the thesis articulated by Haunani-Kay Trask in From a Native Daughter (1993). According to Trask, Hawai‘i, like the mainland United States, is a “settler society,” a “society in which the indigenous” people and culture have been “marginalized,” while those who
came later—the "settlers"—have come to "dominate" (1993:25). In other words, immigrants to Hawai‘i and the rest of the United States came to do well, and they did very, very well. In "Settlers of Color and 'Immigrant' Hegemony: 'Locals' in Hawai‘i," Trask explained that "Asian success proves to be but the latest elaboration of foreign hegemony." First there was the "settlement of European and American businessmen and missionaries, then of the plantation Japanese, Chinese, and eventually Filipino rise to dominance in the islands" (2000:2–3).

Trask noted that Asian Americans in Hawai‘i, especially the Nikkei, point to the plantation era and argue that their group had struggled for so long that they deserve the political and economic supremacy that they later achieved. According to this view, Native Hawaiians are not in power because they have not worked to achieve supremacy. But Trask rejected the idea that Native Hawaiians are like other ethnic groups. In contrast to immigrants and their descendants, she argued, Native Hawaiians are indigenous, their national government was overthrown, and they are entitled to sovereignty. Trask likened Native Hawaiians to the Irish of Northern Ireland and the Palestinians of occupied Palestine—subjugated national groups committed to national liberation. In their "national liberation," Native Hawaiians are struggling for land, water, and other natural resources. According to Trask, settler rise to power was possible because of the theft of the land and the overthrow of the monarchy. Trask’s essay was followed by articles by Kosasa (2000) and Yoshinaga and Kosasa (2000b) who expanded on Trask’s thesis.

The public statements of Kosasa and Yoshinaga, together with those of Mackey, provide voice to those who are dissatisfied with an apparent silence among Nikkei who, they contend, have tended to avoid public self-criticisms. Kosasa, Yoshinaga, and Mackey are part of a younger generation of Nikkei who reject the characterization "quiet and effective." In speaking out, they hope to come to terms with their ethnic group’s history in the islands and with their identity as Nikkei.

To be sure, they do not speak for their generation. No one can. And they anger many in their parents’ generation, who lived through a kind of struggle and deprivation their children and grandchildren did not experience. The uprisings involving Mackey, Yoshinaga, and Kosasa serve as reminders that people’s individual experiences, their personal, political and social values, their social status, their cultural upbringing, and their group’s history play major roles in their interpretation of events.

While such controversies are often unpleasant, they serve the public interest by widening the arena of discourse. Moreover, the public debate may be an indication that the Nikkei as a group has matured in such a way that its members feel comfortable in disagreeing and criticizing each other openly. Such public disagreement enables other Nikkei to reflect on their ethnic identity as a group and as individuals. This is a constructive process because one’s self identity—which is an ongoing, lifelong process—derives in part from one’s group identity. The anthropologist Dorinne Kondo says it well in the title of her book, Crafting Selves (1990). As human beings, we construct, craft, and re-craft our identities in an unending process. In order to do so, it is important to dismantle old myths, listen to others’ experiences and interpretations, and in the process revise our narratives, as we continue to craft ourselves and our understanding of who we are. And the only way to do this is to discuss the issues publicly and invite others to join in the discussion.

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Sweeping Racism under the Rug of “Censorship”:
The Controversy over Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s Blu’s Hanging

CANDACE FUJIKANE

Cover stories cover or mask what they make invisible with an alternative presence; a presence that redirects our attention, that covers or makes absent what has to remain unseen if the seen is to function as the scene for a different drama. One story provides a cover that allows another story (or stories) to sink out of sight. . . . Cover stories are faces for other texts, different texts. They are pretexts that obscure context, fade out subtexts, and . . . protect the texts of the powerful.


I begin with Wahneema Lubiano’s words on what is seen and not seen in representations of an event to open up an investigation of the 1998 controversy over the selection of Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s novel Blu’s Hanging (1997) for the Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) Fiction Award. This controversy took on phenomenal proportions in large part due to already existing local Filipino community concerns in Hawai’i over Yamanaka’s representation of Filipino men as sexual predators in her 1993 collection of poetic novellas, Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre. For over ninety years, Filipino communities in Hawai’i have faced discrimination and racial profiling based on stereotypes of Filipino sexual violence, and the persistence of these stereotypes attests to continuing local Filipino subordination within a system of local Japanese and white structural power.2 Despite letters of protest that poured in to the AAAS Board by Filipinos and their supporters in Hawai’i and across the continent, the three Chinese American members of the Fiction Award Committee presented the award to Blu’s Hanging at the 1998 AAAS national conference in Honolulu. After much discussion and debate, the membership voted to rescind the award presented by the Award Committee (see “Chronology of Events” in Appendix).
The revocation of the award was immediately seized by the local and national media and narrated as a story of "censorship." The cover story of censorship, in fact, enabled another story, the story of local Japanese racism and political dominance in Hawai‘i, to "slink out of sight." This racism disappeared in discussions of the controversy through the abstraction of the censorship argument away from material conditions and structures of domination. Public outcry against censorship has historically been a much more popular national headline in the United States than protests against racism have ever been in a "liberal democracy" that denies the presence of racism: the censorship story offers the possibility of an imaginary resolution to material inequalities through the language of rights and equality for all under the First Amendment, while an examination of racism exposes the very inequalities that the rhetoric of egalitarianism covers over. Although local Filipino and Filipino American protests against the AAAS Fiction Award did not involve the state’s regulation of artistic expression or the banning, boycotting or burning of books, those who used the censorship arguments immediately collapsed the irreducible structural differences between state-enforced censorship and the anti-racism protests of a subordinated minority group. In this way, the irony of the "censorship" argument is that it was used in turn to silence a minority group exercising its First Amendment rights by speaking out about racism.

If the media’s focus on the story of "censorship" rather than on the issue of racism is consistent with the state’s denial of racial inequalities, the censorship argument was also used by Asian Americans who denied structural inequalities among Asian American ethnic groups on the continent. Those who used the censorship arguments often compared the controversy over Blu’s Hanging to literary debates over questions of representation in Maxine Hong Kingston’s The Woman Warrior and Jessica Hagedorn’s Dogeaterrn. Such comparisons tell us much about a fundamental problem that occurs when "Asian American" is homogenized as a category of identity. Criticisms of Kingston’s and Hagedorn’s representations of their own ethnic communities arose within those communities; at issue in the Blu’s Hanging controversy are local Filipino protests against a local Japanese writer’s history and pattern of representing local Filipino sexual violence in the context of local Japanese structural power. Many Asian Americans not only conflated conflicts within an ethnic group and conflicts between ethnic groups, but their assumption that the constituency at stake was a homogeneous "Asian American" one presented a pretext of a unitary "Asian American" community joined in shared struggle while obscuring the text of local Filipino protests against local Japanese racism and protecting the text of local Japanese structural dominance in Hawai‘i.

In order to understand the controversy over Blu’s Hanging, we need to understand that institutional white racism and power in Hawai‘i are all too visible; what has become invisible to many is that local Japanese, too, are politically dominant. Such issues of visibility are at the heart of the ideological maintenance of a system of white and local Japanese power in Hawai‘i. Since individual Asian American ethnic groups are racialized differently according to varying historical, economic, and political pressures and locations, it is important to recognize that local Japanese and local Filipinos are racialized as distinct groups in Hawai‘i.

Although local Japanese have negotiated a past history of anti-Japanese racism (Okihiro 1991), they now dominate state institutions and apparatuses like the State Legislature and the Department of Education, and they author state and federal legislation and other forms of public policy. By contrast, while local Filipinos do participate in the State Legislature and in other state and administrative offices, Filipinos as a group continue to be subjected to racial discrimination and racial profiling in Hawai‘i (Chang 1996). In a study of educational, economic, and occupational status from the 1990 Census data for Hawai‘i, University of Hawai‘i Ethnic Studies professor Jonathan Okamura concludes that "an overall ranking of groups in the ethnic/racial stratification order would have Caucasians, Chinese, and Japanese holding dominant positions," while "the lower levels of the ethnic/racial stratification order continue to be occupied by Filipinos, Hawaiians, and Samoans" (1998:200–201).

The erasure of systemic local Japanese racism in the Blu’s Hanging controversy was performed through a language of rights and freedoms that attempted to foreclose a discussion of racism. Such arguments protecting "artistic freedom" assert that fiction is free from and unfettered by any connections to the material conditions of our lives, thereby rendering the realm of fiction exempt from any charges of racism. It is precisely, however, Blu’s Hanging’s status as fiction that allows it to perform the work of ideology. As Asian American writers and critics have shown, fictional representations of Charlie Chan, Fu Manchu, and Madama Butterfly/Miss Saigon do have discriminatory effects on Asian Americans. In their critiques of the ideological and discursive nature of fiction, these writers and critics illustrate that fictional representations circulate through and beyond any attempts to cordon literature off from our everyday lives.
Literature exerts a material force, and articulatory practices constitute fields of discursivity that inform our social practices because a fictional representation is simultaneously "a fiction and a principle organizing actual social relations" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985:119, emphasis added). I want to emphasize here that these discursive fields are never level playing fields because they are informed by structural systems of power, and we cannot reduce representations in these uneven discursive fields to the argument that "everything is nothing but discourse" because of the ways that material conditions shape and are shaped by those discourses. Literature, then, is ideological in ways that have structural consequences at the same time that structural inequalities underpin the ideological functions of literature.

Critics of Blu's Hanging do not argue that the novel represents all Filipino Americans, but, like other critics of popular, stereotypical images of Asian Americans, we raise questions about systems of power that enable and endorse particular articulations of racism. Yamanaka’s representations of local Filipinos in Blu's Hanging are racist, given that the novel takes place in Hawai’i and given the pattern and history of Yamanaka’s work. I do not, however, want to reduce the subject of the controversy to the racism of an individual writer. Racism is about a system of power in which one group benefits from its domination of another group on the basis of essentialist categories of race or ethnicity; racism is not about individual responses to other individuals. Instead, I focus on the systemic racism that first made possible and later protected the racist representations in Blu's Hanging. In her essay "The Disappearing Debate: Or, how the discussion of racism has been taken over by the censorship issue," African Canadian poet and essayist M. Nourbese Philip argues that critiques of racist representations in fiction are cast as "censorship" in order to refocus the discussion on the individualism of the writer, thus redirecting our attention away from systemic racism. She writes, "It is, perhaps, typical of a liberal democracy that racism in the writing and publishing world would be reduced to the individual writer sitting before her word processor, with only the imagination for company." She further explains, "The weight of racism in the writing world, however, does not reside in the individual white writer, but in the network of institutions and organizations that reinforce each other in the articulation of systemic racism" (1992:277).

In this essay, I argue that close textual analyses of the problems raised by Blu's Hanging are inextricable from a broader consideration of the historical, social and political conditions that enable particular constructions of racism in the novel. I begin by mapping out public responses in Hawai’i to Yamanaka's first book, Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre, which raises questions about the interests of literary criticism and the ways it is often used against oppressed groups. These critical questions returned in discussions of Blu's Hanging that made the context of local Japanese racism disappear in order to lay egalitarian grounds for the censorship arguments. I examine the ideological means by which the narrative of Blu's Hanging enlists a broad base of public support in Hawai’i and on the continent that actually functions to maintain local Japanese and white political power in Hawai’i. To counter these operations of power, local Filipino and Filipino Americans remember the racism that unravels the egalitarian premise of the censorship arguments, thus locating freedom of speech within specific contexts of unequal power relations. I extend my analysis of the erasures performed by the censorship arguments to consider the traces left by those erasures in the comparison of minority communities engaged in anti-racism protests against the AAAS Fiction Award with conservative representatives of the "repressive" state.

As a Yonsei or fourth-generation local Japanese woman, I supported the struggle over Blu's Hanging that was initiated and led by local Filipinos. I saw the ways that responses in my own local Japanese communities to a work of fiction served to sustain a system of local Japanese power in Hawai’i. I want to say here that it is not my intention to diminish our past and present struggles against systemic white racism. Local Japanese, however, continue to tell the stories of our oppression in ways that fail to acknowledge our present oppression of other groups like local Filipinos, and, in the larger picture of colonialism in Hawai’i, local Japanese benefit from the subjugation of Native Hawaiians: the depictions of Japanese struggles in Hawai’i are ones in which, as Native Hawaiian nationalist leader Haunani-Kay Trask (2000a) argues, "the indigenous is wholly denied."

Trask, a professor of Hawaiian Studies at the University of Hawai’i, has shown us that all settlers, including local Asians and Asian Americans, are complicit in U.S. colonial practices and benefit from the American theft of Native lands in Hawai’i and on the continent. She writes,

Modern Hawai’i, like its colonial parent the United States, is a settler society; that is, Hawai’i is a society in which the indigenous culture and people have been murdered, suppressed, or marginalized for the benefit of settlers who now dominate our islands. In settler societies, the issue of civil rights is primarily an issue about how to protect settlers against each other and against
the state. Injustices done against Native people, such as genocide, land
dispossession, language banning, family disintegration, and cultural exploi-
tation, are not part of this intrasettler discussion and are therefore not within
the parameters of civil rights (1993:25).

The denial of local Japanese settler privilege and racism in Hawai‘i obscures not
only intrasettler relations of domination, but also settler and state violence
against Native Hawaiians who struggle for their human rights to self-determi-
nation. At times, Japanese settlers are allied with other settlers of color against
white racism; at other times, Japanese settlers are allied with white settlers
against subordinated groups. These intrasettler struggles have one thing in
common: the contest for settler dominance over the colony of Hawai‘i.

The Blu’s Hanging controversy brings into even sharper focus the colonial alliances between whites and local Japanese in Hawai‘i that frame the
novel and its reception. It is not surprising that many whites in Hawai‘i who
dominate the media supported Yamanaka in both controversies over Saturday
Night at the Pahala Theatre and Blu’s Hanging. The media’s celebration of Blu’s
Hanging as a “quintessential” representation of life in Hawai‘i, to a telling
degree, covers over our settler histories made possible by Native Hawaiian
dispossession. The absence in Blu’s Hanging of the predominantly Native
Hawaiian population on the island of Moloka‘i is ideological: the erasure of a
Native Hawaiian presence in settler literature enacts a depopulation that
renders Hawai‘i an “emptied” space open to settler claims of “belonging.” Such
erasures illustrate what Trask describes as a settler consciousness “attempting
to dispossess our Native people by the back door of identity theft.” In her essay,
“Writing in Captivity: Poetry in a Time of De-Colonization,” Trask argues,

The politics of this kind of theft through falsification is the competition, by
Asian writers, for hegemony with local haole writers attempting to distingui-
sh themselves from Americans on the continent. Both groups write about
Hawai‘i, claiming a uniqueness that seeks to obliterate the Native presence.
Both haole and Asians assert Hawai‘i as theirs; both deny the ancient
Hawaiian cultural and creative ground upon which, as foreigners in our
country, they continue to falsify their history and their status (2000a:54).

The controversy over Blu’s Hanging continues to be an intrasettler struggle that
illustrates the narrative means by which local Japanese and whites continue to
subordinate other settler groups in their maintenance of their own colonial
power.

In the Blu’s Hanging controversy, the cover story of censorship was all too
present, but dominant narratives are never wholly successful. Through their
acts of remembering, speaking, and writing, local Filipinos and Filipino
Americans testified to and critiqued the relationship between literature and
systemic racism, and, in doing so, they inaugurated a critical discussion in
Asian American Studies over relations of power between Asian American
ethnic groups. Their work has taught us much about our need for critical self-
examination, and their efforts have led to the formation of the AAAS Anti-
Racism Coalition comprised of local Asians and Asian Americans who are
committed to challenging racism in our own communities. Many others have
worked to sustain an ongoing discussion of the problems raised by the Blu’s
Hanging controversy and its systemic effects on people’s lives.11

Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre and the Use of Literary
Criticism against Communities beyond the Academy

Yamanaka’s work had a four year history of controversy in Hawai‘i that
predated the crisis over Blu’s Hanging. Criticisms of racism in Yamanaka’s
Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre dating from 1994 have been attributed
by the media to “politically correct” academics at universities, but these
concerns, in fact, originated in local Filipino communities in Hawai‘i beyond
the university. The public discussions of the collection show that, to the
contrary, university professors and other educators used literary criticism
against local Filipinos who raised their concerns about the collection.

Literary criticism has proven to be an effective means by which minority
groups critique and challenge operations of power, but in its most established
and familiar forms, it has been historically deployed against oppressed groups
to sustain bourgeois, patriarchal, racist or colonial systems by privileging
dominant world views. As Terry Eagleton (1983) argues, literary criticism in
the later nineteenth century developed by an English ruling class sought to
“educate” women, workers, and Natives about “universal human values” and
the “moral riches of bourgeois civilization” through literature in order to
redirect them away from collective political action against social and political
injustices. In the case of Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre, literary criticism
was used to protect the writer, the text, and “local” communities from local
Filipino collective charges of racism by refocusing instead on the need to
“educate” local Filipinos about literary reading practices.

At stake for many readers in Hawai‘i was the need to protect the “local.”
Many people in Hawai‘i use “local” as a geographical marker to distinguish
ethnic groups in Hawai‘i from ethnic groups on the continent as I do in this
easy, but my own early work was part of a larger attempt by local Asian scholars
and writers to use "local" identity to signify resistance to Western or continental domination.\footnote{I have found how easy and dangerous it is, however, for us to adopt egalitarian narratives of local "solidarity" that hide systemic racism and our colonial status from view. This usage of "local" returns to a plantation origin in a way that actually affirms a colonial paradigm.} There is no single "local" way of thinking or acting, and writers to use "local" identity to signify resistance to Western or continental domination.\footnote{I have found how easy and dangerous it is, however, for us to adopt egalitarian narratives of local "solidarity" that hide systemic racism and our colonial status from view. This usage of "local" returns to a plantation origin in a way that actually affirms a colonial paradigm.}

In the context of this loaded definition of "local," \textit{Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre} has been phenomenally popular for what many see as its representation of "local" life. In the fall of 1993, Yamanaka read her poems to an audience of over five hundred people at the University of Hawai'i Campus Center Ballroom. The collection gives voice to twelve-year-old girls who speak the unspeakable abuse, transgressing local and patriarchal prohibitions of speech by speaking and writing in a "Pidgin" or Hawai'i Creole English language of their own.\footnote{Self-representation for characters in this collection, however, quickly became controversial because that self-representation was underpinned by stereotypes of local Filipino sexual violence that exacerbate the conditions of racial discrimination local Filipino communities struggle against in Hawai'i. The first poem in the collection, \textquotedblleft Kala Gave Me Anykykine Advice Especially About Filipinos When I Moved to Pahala,\textquotedblright opens with the image of the plantation stereotype of the sexually predatory Filipino man recycled in the education of adolescent girls. The speaker cites Kala's prohibitions: \"No whistle in the dark / or you call the Filipino man / from the old folks home across your house ... / \[H]e going drag you to his house, / tie you to the vinyl chair, / the one he sit on outside all day, / and smile at you with his yellow teeth / and cut off your bi-loot with the cane knife. / \[H]e going fry um in Crisco for dinner.\" The specter of the Filipino man cutting off and eating the speaker's vagina is the historical residue of bachelor camps of Filipino plantation laborers and the representation of Filipino men as sexual threats. The poem is further complicated by a reference at the heart of the poem to a rapist named Felix, who can also be read as Filipino because in its title, the poem centers on advice that is "especially about Filipinos." The speaker continues: \"And no wear tight jeans / or / Felix going follow you home with his blue Valiant ... / Kala said he rape our classmate Abby already / and our classmate Nancy.\"}

Throughout her article, Evangelista emphasizes the importance of writers' First Amendment rights while arguing that local Filipinos must speak out against racism in literature because silence is politically equated with consent. Like African American activists, local Filipinos too, were exercising their First Amendment rights by criticizing fictional representations that uphold a system of racism.

As Evangelista's comparison illustrates, oppressed groups of people exercise their right to freedom of speech within a context of unequal power relations. Differing speech acts are never equally weighed because speakers occupy different positions in systems of institutional power. The fact that some articulations are accorded greater authority than others becomes evident in the public debates over \textit{Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre}. Writers, university professors, and others who claimed institutional authority argued that \"Kala Gave Me Anykykine Advice Especially About Filipinos When I Moved to Pahala\" challenges stereotypes of Filipinos through the very unreliability of Kala's narrative, which undercuts the "advice" she passes on to her listener. At the same time, local Filipino readers and their supporters argued that the poem reinforces entrenched stereotypes of local Filipinos by evoking deeply rooted historical fears of Filipino men. Furthermore, if we identify Felix as Filipino, the poem registers the continuities between the plantation stereotype of the elderly Filipino immigrant and the contemporary stereotype of the young local Filipino rapist. I would also point out that we can neither prove nor disprove the veracity of Kala's assertion regarding the rapes she attributes to Felix in the poem, but Kala's story about Felix holds its own truth value for the community in which it circulates, and her unreliability does not in and of itself challenge the stereotypes of Filipino sexual violence in the poem.

Harnessing racism at work became visible when local Filipinos who raised concerns about \textit{Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre} were told by those from politically and socially dominant groups—local Japanese, Chinese, and
white writers and university professors—that if they read Yamanaka’s representations as racist, they do not know how to grasp the complexity of literature. The refocusing of the discussion, not on the possibility of different readings of the poem but on the inability of local Filipinos to “read” literature, points to the ways that literary criticism continues to be used to divert attention away from substantive issues like racism in order to maintain existing relations of power. The point is precisely that while these stereotypes are “nonsensical” to privileged readers who assume that these images have no power, local Filipinos were testifying to the ways that these stereotypes continue to exert a material force on their lives.

In 1994, the AAAS Board announced that the Literature Award Committee had selected Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre for its Literature Award. At the AAAS Conference at Ann Arbor, Michigan, the Filipino American Studies Caucus conveyed its objections to the AAAS Board, and at a panel entitled “Writers from Bamboo Ridge: Reading and Discussion,” Steffi San Buenaventura, an Asian American Studies professor, directly addressed Yamanaka herself on the concern in local Filipino communities over her work. San Buenaventura pointed out that as a local Japanese woman, Yamanaka possesses the power to depict local Filipinos who have not had the power to represent themselves. San Buenaventura (1999) explained, “I wish that the Filipino man [in “Kala Gave Me Anykine Advice’] had such power of the pen to say who he is, to speak back against the way he has been historically depicted.”

Members of the audience attempted to foreclose criticisms of the collection by narrowing literary criticism to a “specialized” field of knowledge to which only those with a “literary” education have access. San Buenaventura responded by arguing that communities beyond the academy read with the insights of their own historical experiences of oppression and an understanding of the material effects fiction has on their lives. She concludes,

How can you separate the literary world from the community and its concerns? Although critics can construct literary arguments to explain Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre, it has already had an effect on the community’s consciousness that cannot be changed. The collection brings the literary reality to the landscape of the community, and it affects people’s lives there (1999).

At this panel, as in other public discussions, we can see that literary criticism was being used to uphold systems of racism by rendering local Filipinos as “deficient” readers of literary texts and “deficient” readers of race.

Blu’s Hanging: Patterns of Racism in Literary Representation

In response to criticisms of her depiction of Filipino men in Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre, Yamanaka stated in a 1994 interview, “The evil Filipino man with the yellow teeth never materializes in the book. He’s presented as a myth, and that’s where he stays” (quoted in Choo 1994:13). Yet in 1997, a local Filipino man materialized in Yamanaka’s Blu’s Hanging as a child molester and rapist. In Blu’s Hanging, the survival of the central local Japanese family is threatened by Uncle Paulo, a local Filipino character who casually molestes his eight- and thirteen-year-old nieces, who in turn perform oral sex on their male classmates. He later rapes the narrator’s eight-year-old brother, Blu.

Even as the representations of local Filipinos in Blu’s Hanging are part of a larger system of racism in Hawai’i, a pattern of racism visibly emerges in Yamanaka’s own work. Yamanaka’s representation of Uncle Paulo as a child molester and rapist is a deliberate choice that she made as a writer after being directly confronted about her representations of local Filipinos at her readings and interviews during the four years preceding the publication of Blu’s Hanging. In this way, the novel reproduces what local writer Rodney Morales (1998:121) describes as “patterns of representation of an oppressed group by one that is more dominant,” patterns that “cast certain at-risk ethnic groups one-dimensionally.”

Resistance to criticisms of Blu’s Hanging rests upon the argument that the novel does important work in foregrounding the darker underside of life in Hawai’i, and the novel gives voice to the poverty, immorality, and abuse that have long gone unspoken. Thirteen-year-old Ivah Ogata tells the story of a local Japanese family on the island of Moloka’i in the early 1970s. Ivah, her sister Maisie, and her brother Blu struggle in their own ways to cope with their mother’s death, their poverty, their grieving father’s abuse, and the dangers posed by the adults around them.

Although Ivah’s struggle to speak for herself, “to be Ivah too,” foregrounds the importance of asserting one’s voice in the novel, five-year-old Maisie Ogata’s refusal to speak signals the broader search for both verbal and non-verbal forms of self-representation. Immersed in a world of silence since her mother’s death, Maisie does not ask her teacher if she may go to the lavatory, and each day, when she urinates in her pants, her racist white homeroom teacher forces her to remove it even though she has no extra clothes. During recess, the boys look up under Maisie’s dress as she stands silently in
shame squeezing her legs together. Midway through the novel, Maisie finally speaks from her world of silence. Encouraged by her local Japanese teacher, Miss Ito, Maisie reads the directions for the cake they are baking for her birthday. Ivah describes that scene:

“Mix…three…eggs…with two sticks of…butter.” The voice is raspy and low.… She doesn’t look to us for approval. I feel my body start to quiver. Blu presses his face to my back and wraps his arms around my neck.… He wants to cry. His body wants to crumble. But he holds on. “Whass my name? Whass my name?” he asks over and over.

For the girl without words, there is laughter for what is light, gesture for want, and tears for all that is dark. There is not much more. Names are nothing but extravagance.

I listen to the teacher speak each word as my sister repeats them slowly. I keep each word as I would a precious stone. These are gifts from God. Listen to the voice that hangs in the air (Blu’s Hanging, 130–131).

If the novel is about reclaiming the voices of the oppressed, it is Maisie’s struggle to represent herself that many readers identify with Yamanaka’s assertion of her own voice.

Self-representation also raises a number of problems, given conditions in which some groups have greater access to the means of self-representation than others. 15 Blu’s Hanging itself is based on structural inequalities in Hawai‘i while the novel also inverts them. In the world of the novel, the poverty-stricken Ogata family is an anomaly, alienated from and exploited by the middle-class Japanese and repositioned with socioeconomically subordinated groups. Ivah tells us, “We get a free lunch now with the tin-type tokens handed out by the teacher in the morning. Most of the Japanese and Pakes [Chinese] don’t get tokens. Most of the Portuguese, Hawaiians and Filipinos do. I’m the only Japanese who gets a free lunch token, but I don’t care” (Blu’s Hanging, 104–105).

In this community, the local Filipino Reyes family occupies a seemingly more socioeconomically secure position than the Ogatas. Even something as seemingly inconsequential as chewing gum comes to represent the lack that marks the Ogata children, and Ivah is ashamed of her dependency on Evangeline Reyes: “I felt funny every day asking Evangeline to give me a stick of gum from the Pfan TPak stash that she had in her patent-leather white bag” (Blu’s Hanging, 5). For Ivah, Evangeline becomes evocative of a material plentitude Ivah herself does not possess.

Through inverting the economic situations of the Japanese and Filipino families, Blu’s Hanging masks the ethnic privileges that the Ogatas possess as members of the local Japanese community. Although the Ogatas themselves are excluded from the Japanese middle class, they derive other benefits from belonging to that ethnic group. Ivah’s way out of her oppressive situation is made possible by the local Japanese teachers who help to send her to Mid-Pacific Institute, a private college-preparatory high school in Honolulu that Miss Ito describes as largely attended by “haoles and rich Japanese and Chinese kids” (Blu’s Hanging, 133). The Reyes sisters find no such resolution to their own oppressive circumstances. By masking the Ogatas’ ethnic privilege, the narrative suggests that Ivah’s access to Mid-Pac is based on her personal merit, a narrative of liberal individualism that “naturalizes” the ethnic stratifications in the novel.

Moreover Blu’s Hanging represents the local Japanese family as a “victim” of oppression by casting the local Filipino family as a sexual threat. In a scene that most graphically portrays Uncle Paulo’s rapacity, Blu tells Ivah what he saw at the Reyes’ house when looking for his nine-year-old girlfriend Blendaline: “I wen’ open the door slow kine ‘cause I heard Blendie making the love sound she make when she do that kind stuff and they was on the bed. Blendie and her Uncle Paulo was on the bed all naked and oofing each other, for real, Ivah, I seen um…. He get Evangeline and Blendaline. Pretty soon, maybe he going oof Henrilyn and Trixi” (Blu’s Hanging, 173). Blu further explains: “I heard Uncle Paulo calling Trixi, ‘C’mon Trixi Treat. You going be the best. You the tightest. Uncle neva come yet.” Blu’s innocence becomes a measure of the veracity of his account; he does not understand six-year-old Trixi’s fear as he tells Ivah, “I dunno why Trixi gotta cry, shex…wen’ look like Uncle Paulo and Blendie was having good fun.”

Uncle Paulo does speak out about Japanese structural racism, but that singular moment works to cast his violence problematically as the direct outcome of the racism local Filipinos face:

“Why, why,” Uncle Paulo says to me, and I smell the liquor on his breath, “whass wrong with my niece playing wit’ yo’ bradda? What, he mo’ betta than her ‘cause he Japanese? Fuck, Japs for think they mo’ betta than everybody else, fuckas. Especially the Filipinos. Fuck, everybody for spit on Filipinos, shit. You fuckin’ snipes” (Blu’s Hanging, 207).

By this time, Uncle Paulo has committed several violent acts with no visible ambivalence, and to suggest that he is violent because of the racism he has
experienced becomes an attempt to naturalize his sexual violence through a social determinism that denies local Filipinos any capacity for agency. If the ethnic identity of the Reyes sisters is a source of ambiguity—they are half-Japanese on their father’s side—Uncle Paulo’s ethnic identity is not: he is his mother’s brother, and his local Filipino identity becomes the locus of meaning (Blu’s Hanging, 172). Because we are given so little information about him, his sexual violence becomes less a function of the racism around him than a function of his ethnicity, particularly since his character was produced in the context of Yamanaka’s own past representations of local Filipino men and a history of entrenched stereotypes of Filipino male sexual violence in Hawai’i.

In their own accounts, local Filipino students describe both the phantasmatic effects that literature has on our social and political imaginations and the ways that literature can exacerbate discriminatory conditions that Filipinos in Hawai’i face. Christine Takahashi Queuel, a teaching assistant in the UH Ethnic Studies Department, explains,

I’ve talked to local Filipino male students in my class, and they say that this book makes them feel like every time they walk down the street, there are people who shrink away from them because they’re thinking, “Oh, there goes another Filipino, going home to rape his nieces.” That’s how this book makes them feel. They already feel disempowered, and the book disempowers them even more. They are afraid to say what they feel because they are not literature majors, and they feel even further disempowered (1997).

This is not the oversimplified situation the media have described whereby local Filipinos are mistaking fiction for reality. Although many readers will not automatically assume local Filipino men to be rapists, many others find that the novel affirms historically entrenched ideologies that criminalize Filipinos. These local Filipino students’ fears were confirmed by students and others in Hawai’i who argued during the controversy that “Filipinos really are like that.” Readers have even cited Hawai’i rape statistics to prove the “truth” of Yamanaka’s portrayal of Uncle Paulo despite the fact that rape and incest occur in all ethnic communities. These assertions point to the structural racism that render some “truths” more visible than others as a matter of power, a problem of visibility to which I will return.

Uncle Paulo’s character is not a free-floating product of Yamanaka’s imagination. His character emerged out of a context of long-standing and deeply-rooted racist fears of Filipino sexual violence, much like racist stereotypes on the continent of African American sexual violence. Linda Revilla, a fiction writer and a developmental psychologist who teaches courses in the UH Ethnic Studies Department, explains that “This is how it has been for 90 years for Filipinos in Hawai’i… What Yamanaka is doing is nothing new” (quoted in Sobredo 1998:64). Revilla quotes a UH student who writes:

Throughout my days at elementary school…Filipinos were labeled as being stupid, backwards, and capable of only the most menial jobs available… In my own experiences I knew that these generalizations were false, but still I feared association with them. These images and stereotypes persisted in the consciousness of the student body for so long that I began to look at being Filipino as a curse. It embarrassed me that I should be a part of a race so disregarded and dehumanized by society (1998:8).

Revilla further explains that these conditions span two generations for this student who describes how her experiences mirror those of her own father decades earlier. Revilla writes, “every semester that I teach a course on Filipinos in Hawai’i, the majority of student essays that I read say the same thing: ‘I denied being Filipino.’ ‘I grew up ashamed of being Filipino.’”

Darlene Rodrigues, a third-generation local Filipina poet, summarizes the problems regarding the novel’s reification of essentialist categories of ethnicity and race:

[Yamanaka] shows us that poverty-stricken local Japanese have strength and courage, that they are full of humanity and resilience. Filipino characters in her works, however, are not allowed the full spectrum of humanity found in the likes of her Japanese characters, Iva, Blu, and Maisie. There is a difference between a writer showing us how an adolescent narrator can only perceive Filipinos from her own narrow point of view, and a writer creating Filipino characters whose actions confirm the stereotypes. A community such as the Filipino one in Hawai’i is diverse in history, people, and even its languages… The community that I know and am a part of, however, is nowhere to be found in Blu’s Hanging. This is not just a case of “gone missing”; it’s one of complete erasure of the diversity and richness of Filipino communities (2000:200).

The Disappearing Narratives of Local Japanese Power

We can ask what is seen and not seen in the telling of these events, how the glossing over of particularities enables some stories to be visible so that others may disappear, how dominant groups benefit from the visibility of some stories and the invisibility of others. The disappearance of contextual specificities and the glossing over of textual problems in Blu’s Hanging can be traced in a form letter authored by a Japanese American writer supporting Yamanaka
that was later sent to the AAAS Board by eighty-two writers. The form letter states:

1) I wish to protest the AAAS Board’s decision in 1997 to ignore the choice of its 1997 literary awards committee to give a book award to Lois-Ann Yamanka [sic] for Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers. I also urge the Board to recognize the decision of its literary awards committee to give a book award to Yamanka’s Blu’s Hanging in 1998.

2) I am concerned too with a reading of Yamanka’s work which ignores or misreads the way a fictional character or narrator functions in a literary work.

3) I also wish to reaffirm that writers often must, by the nature of their enterprise, upset and question prevailing views, evoke extreme and visceral reactions, and write in ways where ambiguity and complexity take precedence over “political correctness” or safe and comforting portraits of the world, our community, or the individuals who reside there.

4) I am also concerned with the way the AAAS has sometimes seemed to organize “witch hunts” against various writers. This is not to say that writers should be immune from criticism. Indeed, criticism is a necessary part of the creation of a literary culture. Perhaps, though, it might be helpful for people to look into the mechanism and psychological reasons why those within a community wish to tear someone from the community apart once they have become successful. Rather than encouraging literary variety and creativity and recognizing the difficulty of the tasks which writers and other artists perform, the AAAS seems at times to have been attempting to invoke conformity [sic] and silence.

The first literary argument raised in the form letter centers on the unreliability of the narrator. In Blu’s Hanging, Ihav’s unreliability is indeed most marked in her representations of the Reyes sisters, whom she describes as the “Human Rats who suck and lick,” but there are other moments when Ihav feels compassion for the youngest sisters (Blu’s Hanging, 158). Even as Yamanka illustrates Ihav’s limited local Japanese perspective, she also allows us to question her naivé and distorted depictions of the Reyes sisters by enabling us to perceive what Ihav cannot. We see, for example, the lessons that the sisters teach each other to endure their own abuse. When Blu tells Ihav what Evangeline and Blendaline do to cats, Ihav asks Blu, “What Henrilyn and Trixi was doing when Evangeline and Blendaline was telling you all this?” Blu replies, “Henrilyn breathe heavy, and Trixi, she cover her ears. Evangeline said pretty soon Henri going handle and then they can work on Trixi” (Blu’s Hanging, 29). In this scene, the narrative shows us how the Reyes sisters believe that they must discipline themselves to adapt to oppressive conditions they feel they cannot change.

Uncle Paulo’s sexual violence, however, consists of irreducible acts that anchor the text. Ihav tells us what she sees of Uncle Paulo’s actions, not what she imagines, and other characters corroborate her narrative account (Blu’s Hanging, 150, 247, 253). While the novel contrasts descriptions of mythic sexual predators—the Ogata’s black neighbor, Clarence Briggs, and Lerch—with the “real” sexual predators—the boy in the olive-green Duster, Mr. Iwasaki, and Uncle Paulo—it also markedly contrasts the effects of Mr. Iwasaki’s implied voyeurism and Uncle Paulo’s molestation of his nieces and of Blu. The entire Ogata family is traumatized when Uncle Paulo rapes Blu, and that scene serves as a pivotal moment in the novel that reaffirms Ihav’s decision to leave home with the conviction that she is providing a way out of their oppressive situation for Blu and Maisie. Leonard Andaya (1999), a professor of history at the University of Hawai‘i, comments on the problems posed by such fictional representations: “Growing up on a sugar plantation camp in Spreckelsville, Maui, I absorbed the stereotype of Filipinos as sexually deprived, but my feeling was that those were not the actual things that happened in the camps. Blu’s Hanging, however, carries out those stereotypical perceptions into ‘reality’ by having characters perform stereotypical acts.”

The form letter states that those who criticize racism in fiction want a “safe and comforting portrait of the world,” but the problem is precisely that the novel provides such a “safe” portrait insofar as Uncle Paulo’s actions enable the local Japanese characters and communities in Hawai‘i to maintain their world views, including racist views of local Filipinos. Although the AAAS Award Committee argues that Yamanka’s “exploration of the brutal facts of racial, ethnic, sexual, and class conflict” is in itself a critique (Simpson, Eng and Ho 1998:7), re-presenting a racist stereotype does not in and of itself constitute a critique of that stereotype. Moreover, depicting a racial conflict does not in and of itself constitute a critique of power when the conflict is portrayed in ways that benefit the dominant group. The novel does not challenge racist representations of Filipino male sexual violence; instead, Uncle Paulo’s actions confirm them.

Criticisms of racist representations in Blu’s Hanging go beyond a desire for “positive role models” by demanding that we ask hard questions about the persistence of some representations and the absence of others. To return to my epigraph, we can ask, who benefits from the high visibility of the cover story of local Filipino sexual violence? The elusive text is indeed one of local Japanese ascendency to political power after the 1954 Democratic Party “Revolution.”
Such political power enabled local Japanese to exert greater control over the narration of history, and the stereotypes of sexually predatory Filipino men, like stereotypes of African American men, persist and have been compulsively repeated historically to secure systems of power based on racialized differences. The stereotypes originated on the plantations where Filipino bachelors were regarded as sexual threats, but the cover story of the stereotype depends upon the disappearance of other stories. The stereotypes redirect attention away from other ethnic communities' anxieties over women's agency and conditions of exploitation: women from Japanese, Chinese, and other ethnic camps married Filipino men while other women were prostituted by men from their own communities in Filipino bachelor camps. That accounts of Filipino "wife-stealing" have been popularized more widely than corresponding accounts of Japanese "wife-stealing" testifies to the ways that history is renarrated to sustain the interests of dominant groups (see Okihiro 1994:32).

If we are to return to the material inequalities of the novel's production, we can also examine the ways that Bla's Hanging is an attempt to rewrite local Japanese privilege in Hawai'i. In her essay, "Parallels in Identity: Whites and Local Japanese Americans in Hawai'i," Kathi Takakuwa examines the similarities between whites and local Japanese based on Henry A. Giroux's analysis of white responses to racism that involve "reimagining one's self as victim." She argues that because local Japanese in Hawai'i have come to acquire prominent positions of power in politics, Yamanaka's novel fulfills a desire many local Japanese feel to "reimage" themselves as victims of oppression. Takakuwa (nd:3) writes, "I hypothesize that similarly, Yamanaka's work has been so widely, enthusiastically embraced by local Japanese because at a time when local Japanese 'do not feel that they have an "ethnicity,"' or if they do, that it's not one they feel too good about,' Yamanaka's work recovers an admirable, wholesome representation of Japanese" by positioning her characters as "besieged" victims of multiple forms of discrimination, including classism, racism, homophobia, and bias against language, as well as physical violence.

We can extend Takakuwa's analysis to consider the ideological means by which the novel has enlisted a broad base of support from socioeconomically and politically subordinated groups in Hawai'i by presenting the Ogata family members as victims of discrimination. As readers characterize criticisms of the novel's racist representations as a broad attack on the novel as a whole, they then align Filipino critiques of racism in the novel with the oppressive forces in the novel. Instead, we can consider how the novel critiques some dominant ideologies by reifying or reinscribing others; the novel's critique of some forms of power often functions to maintain other structures of inequality. As the Ogata family sees in Iwah's departure for an elite private school the promise of its own class ascendency at the end of the novel, Bla's Hanging is, ultimately, a narrative of local Japanese upward mobility, and its use of a sexually violent Filipino character to convince Iwah of the necessity of her departure illustrates the novel's dependence upon the continued subordination of some ethnic groups. The public mobilization of readers from subordinated groups in support of Yamanaka against local Filipino critiques of racism in the novel paints a larger portrait of the hegemonic way that Bla's Hanging upholds a particular social order that benefits local Japanese.

We can also ask why there was so much white support of Yamanaka's work. During the controversy, newspaper headlines that read, "Do all our villains need to be white?" reveal in a very telling way the investments white readers have in celebrating the novel's shift away from a focus on white racism (quoted in Nakaso 1998:A1, A4). Although the form letter concludes by casting the critics of Bla's Hanging as "those who wish to tear someone from the community apart once they have become successful," we can answer the question that Christine So (1999:5) raises in her own analysis of Bla's Hanging: "Against whom do Iwah, Bla, and Maisie primarily resist?" It is, in fact, the sexual violence of a local Filipino character who makes this narrative of local Japanese "success" possible. As whites and privileged East Asian American groups—Japanese and Chinese Americans—continue to homogenize Asian Americans as "those within a [singular] community," Filipino American Studies Caucus members in the AAAS like August Espiritu (1998a:67) argue that "the novel enacts a vision of racial and ethnic formation as a matter of stepping on the backs of 'Others.'"

To return to the writers' concerns over freedom of speech: although the form letter characterizes the crisis as one in which the AAAS censored its constituents, local Filipinos and Filipino Americans were speaking out against the workings of power in institutional discourses of literary criticism and censorship, and they brought the concerns of their own ethnic communities to Asian American Studies. Joan May Cordova (1999), a member of the AAAS Filipino American Studies Caucus, emphasizes that the controversy is about listening to the community voices of protest: "I know of many people who were reminded of how, in the struggle to create Ethnic Studies years ago, students challenged institutions to be more accountable to our communities. The 1998..."
struggle captures the spirit of a new generation’s efforts to reaffirm our commitment to communities beyond the academy.”

Against Erasure: Remembering and Resisting the Text of Racism

As public spaces were overtaken by narratives of censorship and First Amendment rights, local Filipino and Filipino American communities continued to be sites of resistance from which people articulated the material effects of Blu’s Hanging on their lives. Readers have argued that the value of Blu’s Hanging lies in its provocation of a critical discussion of racism in Hawai‘i, but as I have argued, the novel actually reinscribes existing conditions of racism: this discussion of racism was a result of the critical intervention of local Filipinos and Filipino Americans who challenged the novel’s racist representations. Bennette Evangelista’s article in the local Filipino newspaper The Fil-Am Courier raised community concerns that were later discussed in the local Japanese newspaper The Hawaii Herald, as well as in the free alternative paper, the Honolulu Weekly. As Evangelista laid the groundwork in Hawai‘i for community discussions of Yamanaka’s work, local Filipino and Filipino American students, university professors and writers worked within the AAAS to open up a space for a discussion of the novel. Jonathan Okamura (1998b:3), a member of the Anti-Racism Coalition, explains that “The reason the resolution to revoke the award was approved was primarily due to the initiative and commitment of the Filipino American graduate students. They organized and led our planning meetings prior to the vote on the resolution, drafted the resolution itself, spoke courageously at the open forums on the issue, and recruited student and faculty supporters from other Asian American groups.”

As dominant East Asian American groups attempted to adjudicate definitions of racism for Filipinos in Hawai‘i and on the continent (LaVilla 1998:1), local Filipinos and Filipino Americans contested their capacity to do so by engaging in radical acts of remembering and re-piecing together the memories of racism that those from dominant groups found all too easy to forget. As ever-present as the narratives sustaining the novel and its political interests were, local Filipinos and Filipino Americans at the 1998 AAAS Forum in Honolulu described the relationship between the novel and their collective experiences of systemic racism, and their arguments could not be refuted or denied. After hearing them speak, the AAAS membership voted to rescind the award.

Many of the “official” narratives of the controversy erased local Filipino and Filipino American leadership of the anti-racism protests, and it is this very erasure of race that makes possible the reification of American individualism and a rhetoric of equivalences. In a very revealing moment, the May 1998 letter written by the 1997 AAAS Fiction Award Committee reaffirms its decision to present the award to Blu’s Hanging on the grounds that there is a lack of consensus among “Asian American readers” regarding the novel’s racism:

In short, there is no clear critical consensus among Asian American readers of the value of Yamanaka’s artistic work or her representations of Filipino Americans and other ethnic groups. Yet, despite this lack of consensus, Yamanaka’s detractors demand that the Fiction Award Committee as well as the AAAS Board withdraw its support of Blu’s Hanging for this year’s prize as part of their ongoing belief that Yamanaka’s work is not only dangerous but also needs to be censored and unacknowledged by Asian American critics (Simpson, Eng and Ho 1998:7).

The Committee’s letter raises a number of problems, not the least of which is the identification of the protesters as “Yamanaka’s detractors.” This practice was not limited to the Committee alone: in other media sources, the protesters were also described as “the anti-Yamanaka faction,” “the anti-Yamanaka clique,” and “the opposition to Yamanaka.” This form of identification reduces Filipino critiques of systemic racism to racialized and personalized attacks on the integrity of an individual writer. As UH Ethnic Studies professor Dean Alegado (1999) explains, “Most of the quotes in the media focused on Yamanaka rather than on the reasons for the protest, rather than on what had created the tension. There was no historical framework provided, no explanation that this controversy was not new but was part of a larger controversy dating since Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre.” The emphasis on individualism obscures the writer’s individual ties to institutional power, despite the fact that as Wahneema Lubiano (1992:326) points out, “Individuals are always wrapped in larger world narrative contexts.”

The Committee’s erasure of Filipino communities in Hawai‘i and on the continent elides the framework of racism that is the subject of the anti-racism protests. That elision leads the Committee to make the highly problematic demand for “consensus” within a system of unequal power relations. The logic employed in this letter, then, is that a majority is needed to make a valid charge of racism: such logic precludes the very possibility of critiquing systemic racism from a minority position.

Furthermore, the Committee’s erasure of race also enables the characterization of anti-racism critiques as a “demand for censorship,” which recasts the protesters as those who wield state power and support conservative agendas.
August Espiritu argues, however, that the censorship arguments were made by misrepresenting the history of anti-racism critiques directed at Yamanaka's work:

The framing of the issue on the basis of freedom of speech or censorship is based on a deliberate obfuscating of the meaning of censorship and a misrepresentation of the goals of the protest... no one among the Filipino American Studies Caucus or Anti-Racism Coalition ever called for the "suppression" or "deletion" of the book or any of its parts. Nor did we ever call for the banning of the book, advocate any boycott, or prevent anyone from reading or purchasing the book. Thus, to use the word censorship against the protesters is not only inaccurate but irresponsible and is a conscious misrepresentation of the goals of the protest. In fact, over and over again, in letters, one-to-one discussions, as well as in public pronouncements, members of the protest enjoined everyone to read the book, buy it, or check it out from the library, and discuss it (1998b:26).

The term "censorship," like the term "political correctness," was used to foreclose a meaningful discussion of racism and literature. Unlike censorship, which is used by the state to arrest the production of a work of art and to hide it from view, a minority community critical of Blu's Hanging upheld the principles of freedom of speech by calling for readers to read the novel and to participate in an informed discussion of it.

As I turn to local Filipino and Filipino American criticisms of the systems of power that uphold racist representations, I want to address the fact that there were Filipinos who did not find Blu's Hanging to be racist. Their responses do not diminish the discriminatory effects the novel has had for others even as these Filipino responses were used by East Asian Americans to locate the problem within the protesters as individuals and not in the larger structures of racism. By formulating the problem as something the protesters had to "get over," dominant groups demand that protesting Filipinos, like the Reyes sisters, accommodate themselves to systemic racism, not change it.

During the controversy, Filipinos in Hawai'i and on the continent asked what made it possible for the AAAS and Asian American communities to "forget" the history of controversy behind Yamanaka's work. Emily Lawsin (1998:65), a poet and a member of the Filipino American Studies Caucus, explains, "We were astonished that we were reliving what we went through three years before. We're questioning the absence of memory in our Association." The ability of many to "forget" Filipino protests, Lawsin argues, "represents the marginalization of Filipinos not only in Hawaii, but also within Asian American Studies, our own Association and academia in general."

Community forums were sites of resistance from which local Filipinos and Filipino Americans remembered and acted upon their collective experiences of systemic racism. Many local Filipinos spoke out about the racism in the novel at the 1998 annual convention of the O'ahu Filipino Community Council (OFCC), which includes over fifty local Filipino organizations, and the OFCC passed its own resolution condemning the racism in Blu's Hanging. Alfred Evangelista (1999a), legal counsel for the OFCC and a third-generation local Filipino who grew up on the plantations in Hawai'i, attributes the lack of respect for Filipino concerns to the way that "Filipinos are not seen to be a full part of this local community, regardless of the fact that Cayetano is governor." Given the difficulty of speaking out against racism under these conditions, Evangelista (1999b) explains, "Filipinos aren't speaking out because we're branded as oversensitive. Why bring double-pain? You're already hurting inside, and then for you to stand up and to speak out and then get shouted down, that's double-pain."

The use of the censorship argument to silence protests against racism has had a profound effect on those who have bodily memories of their own histories of oppression. Carlo G. Arreglo, a graduate student in the UH English Department, analyzes the ways in which other graduate students' censorship claims in the classroom made it difficult for him to speak critically about Blu's Hanging. In response to the pressures he was made to feel to swallow his analyses of racism in the novel, Arreglo (2000) wrote a poem about the body's vomiting of that speech, of the memories of racism that pour out beyond the pressures exerted to contain them:

(MIS)READING
If I hear one more
time, about the freedom of the writer,
I'm gonna puke,
maybe on you
or choke on the plantation dirt shoveled by the sakadas,
choke on the severed heads of salmon caught by the alaskeros,
choke on the blood, shit, semen, grime
sponged by pinays in hospitals and hotels
while you sit there and insist

"this isn't racist
these aren't stereotypes,
this is freedom,
this is truth."
Arreglo writes in his analysis of the poem, “This poem has to do with silence and the ways in which Filipinos get silenced in various settings in reaction to Yamanaka’s insistent portrayals of Filipinos from Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre to Blu’s Hanging. Throughout the poem, the narrator never finds a voice to disagree but has a visceral reaction to the offensive stereotypes. . . S/he’s silenced by the accusation of censorship.”

In “Imagining Ourselves: Reflections on the Controversy over Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s Blu’s Hanging,” Darlene Rodrigues (2000) describes the kind of historical pain that Blu’s Hanging and the controversy reproduces. She writes, “This history of oppression comes down to us and is stored in the memory of our blood. I always carry a dull pain with me, but with regards to Blu’s Hanging, the pain became so acute, so sharp because I see with such clarity the intimate proof of the racism I have dealt with all my life as a Filipina in Hawai’i.” Rodrigues further describes the difficulty of speaking about racism in Hawai’i:

It’s been very difficult to write this piece. My body shuts down. I feel arrested. I always have the feeling of things unsaid in my throat. The sadness of injustice, the sadness of my forefathers and foremothers, all the pain and suffering they had to go through, that’s what I feel in my throat. I don’t know if I’m overwhelmed by everything that I’m trying to say, or if I’m afraid of what it is I have to say about racism in Hawai’i. When I am brave, I just think of being true to what I have to say, and that is the hardest thing to do because I was force-fed the illusion that race doesn’t matter among Asians in Hawai’i. I want to say these things to break down that illusion. The angry part of me is there, and it’s raging to go, but my body shuts down. I am made to feel like a little girl who must not say anything; I must not draw attention to myself. Just be quiet. I am made to muffle my anger about the racism that Filipinos live with each day (2000:202).

When those who used the word “censorship” presumed the authority of adjudicating what is and is not racism for local Filipinos, they were exercising both the privilege of never knowing Filipino oppression and the privilege of “forgetting” their own roles in systems of domination local Filipinos were testifying against. Filipinos in Hawai’i and on the continent, however, bear witness to the structures of oppression that the privileged seek to erase.

The Abstraction of “Censorship” and the Construction of “Power”

Censorship has been revisited by a number of cultural critics who seek to locate an increasingly abstract discourse in specific material contexts. When “censorship” is broadly defined to refer to any and all forms of silencing, what becomes most pronounced is the absence of the state, the locus of power that, in its most repressive forms, seizes artistic production. Since the anti-racism protests against the AAAS Award presented to Blu’s Hanging was not about state-enforced censorship, it was precisely the absence of the state that led to a series of uneasy substitutions orchestrated to evoke the specter of the state. As Christine So (1999:5) notes in her essay “Free Speech, Censorship, and Literary Violence: Reading the Debates over Blu’s Hanging,” those who made the censorship arguments cast themselves as “patriotic citizens” upholding the First Amendment against Asian American Studies and its exclusionary agenda. So argues that “What is particularly telling, however, is the way in which the media has at once empowered and disempowered Asian American studies. By portraying the AAAS and its members as a dominant power and yet simultaneously framing the organization by its marginality, these articles reinforce the threat of Asian American studies while at the same time dismissing its importance.” The media’s ambivalence toward Asian American Studies stems from the way many wanted to see it as emblematic of the “repressive” state at the same time that it cannot help but evoke a history of racial inequalities that, as I have argued, has never been a popular national headline.

Through sleights of writing and rhetoric, the anti-racism nature of the protests had to be contained and made to “disappear” in order to make the “liberal” state the champion of freedom of speech while evoking the shadow of the “repressive” state as the agent of censorship. The compulsion to represent the controversy in the light of state-enforced censorship became even clearer when Yamanaka was compared to writers persecuted during the Cultural Revolution, to Salman Rushdie, and to the victims of McCarthyite witch hunts. Local Filipino and Filipino American activists were displaced by groups who represent institutional power within Asian American Studies: the AAAS or “politically correct academics” at universities or those from dominant ethnic groups in the AAAS, namely local Japanese and Japanese Americans. It then became easier to compare these groups—however marginalized they continue to be on the continent in relation to the state—to conservative representatives of the repressive state: the Red Guard, the Ayatollah, McCarthy, Dan Quayle and Newt Gingrich. Yet as So observes, Asian American Studies was not a satisfactory substitute, and instead, the very ambivalence about depicting it as a representative of the repressive state points to the fundamental problem of casting anti-racism protests as censorship.

I turn now to a particular event that visually illustrates the disappearing acts that were performed during the controversy. A year after the AAAS
Conference in Honolulu, during the weeks of May 12–18, June 16–22, and August 11–17, 1999, the Honolulu Weekly, a free alternative newspaper, ran a color advertisement for itself in which a photograph of Yamanaka dressed in black is framed by the outline of a book as the shadow of a noose swings in front of her. The caption reads, "THINK FREE. SPEAK FREE. BE FREE. LOIS-ANN YAMANAKA, WRITER." The ad, which was also prominently displayed on Honolulu Weekly dispensers around the city, is a part of a “Get the Real Scoop” series of ads aimed at contrasting the Weekly with the daily papers in Honolulu. The Weekly, however, did not publish a full story on the Bla’s Hanging controversy, while the ad makes its own statement about what was popularly perceived as the “lynching” of a local writer.

In its very erasures, the advertisement is politically loaded. It produces an image of the writer severed from any ties to power. The photograph of Yamanaka is abstracted from any material context and is superimposed on a blue screen, a “blank” space emptied of history, place, and politics, and evacuated certainly of any narratives of power. Local Filipinos and Filipino Americans who voiced their concerns were taken out of the picture and replaced by an abstraction of the state implicit in the visual allegory of censorship. The systems of power that support the representations of local Filipinos in Bla’s Hanging were also erased and replaced by the image of the lone writer. In this way, systemic racism disappears in the face of mythic American individualism.

The image of the lynch writer is also striking when we locate Yamanaka’s magnification of the stereotype of local Filipino sexual violence within the historical context of lynching in the United States and in Hawai‘i. Lynchings have historically been a form of state-sanctioned violence based on false pretenses of African American and Filipino sexual violence in order to prevent these groups from collective political action. After the Civil War, black men were terrorized in the South by lynchings to prevent them from asserting their voting rights and their right to participate in government, while in the early twentieth century, Filipino men were persecuted and killed on the West Coast by farmers to prevent them from organizing labor unions. In Hawai‘i, Filipino men were racially profiled for sexual crimes and executed in rushed and suspect trials during Hawai‘i’s territorial period, a history that is under investigation by Leeward Community College counselor Ernest Libarios, Deputy Public Defender Clayton Kimoto and Federal Public Defender William Domingo. The focus on stereotypes of black and Filipino sexual violence diverts attention away from these histories of state-sanctioned violence and their political dimensions. In this context, the advertisement, too, functions to evaporate these histories of state violence against Filipino men for political purposes.

Throughout the controversy, local Filipinos and Filipino Americans have countered these erasures in the media through their critical analyses of inequalities in local Asian and Asian American communities in Hawai‘i and on the continent. We can also turn to a visual image of protest to counter the Honolulu Weekly’s advertisement of the “censorship” story: a photograph of the AAAS Filipino American Studies Caucus protest at the 1998 AAAS conference taken by Mary Uyematsu Kao and first featured in Amerasia Journal’s 1998 Centennial Commemorative Issue, Essays into American Empire in the Philippines. The protestors, Filipino men and women, as well as men and women from the AAAS Anti-Racism Coalition, stand with their backs to the podium, hands joined and heads bowed in a chosen moment of silence that speaks of a resounding presence and a profound refusal.

Conclusion
In this essay, I have focused on racism in local Asian communities in Hawai‘i, but structural inequalities among Asian American ethnic groups on the continent beg further analysis. Letters of protest against the AAAS Award sent to the AAAS Board and reprinted in Hawai‘i in The Fil-Am Courier raise questions for Asian Americans on the continent about the dominance of East Asian American scholarship in Asian American Studies (The Fil-Am Courier 1998). Elizabeth Pisares, then an English graduate student at UC Berkeley, writes, “In short, the Fiction Award Committee’s decision is symptomatic of a larger crisis: the ethnic stratification of the Asian American studies disciplinary coalition, which is not unique to the local politics and culture of Hawai‘i, but was always and remains a problem for mainland Asian America.” August Espiritu also argues that “As Asian Americans, we cannot be satisfied with challenging white racism alone. We have to challenge racism everywhere, including amongst ourselves.” Asian Americans must engage in self-critical examination, or we will continue to reproduce the very systems of domination that we seek to change.

During the controversy, many local Asians and Asian Americans argued that an examination of conflicts within our communities serves the interests of the state by “playing the plantation game” and submitting to institutional strategies of “divide and conquer” by which the state pits minority groups against each other. The problem with this formulation, however, is that we no longer live on the plantations. As we continue to struggle against anti-Asian
racism and violence, we must also face the fact that Asian American ethnic groups like local Japanese in Hawai‘i now exercise considerable institutional and state power. It is precisely the denial of structural inequalities among local Asians and Asian Americans that preserves the very inequalities upon which the state and its ideologies of egalitarianism in fact depend. And in a place like Hawai‘i where local Japanese dominate state institutions, the denial of local Japanese racism clearly benefits local Japanese, who substantially comprise the state.

As local Asians and Asian Americans, we are settlers, and we cannot hide behind the cover story of our own oppression. Those of us who have spoken about racism in local Japanese communities have been “disciplined” by being characterized as “anti-Japanese.” Such a characterization preserves local Japanese structural power by realigning our critical position with anti-Japanese white racism. What remains, however, what cannot be assimilated into this equation, is the substantive issue at stake: how we as local Japanese oppress other groups.

To speak out against local Japanese racism and colonialism is not to malign local Japanese communities but rather to hold ourselves accountable to a broader vision of justice.

Appendix: Chronology of Events in the Blu’s Hanging Controversy

In the following chronology, I draw from unofficial timelines pieced together by Daniel Y. Kim, Oliver Wang and myself.

Fall 1993: Publication of Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre.

January 1, 1994: The Hawaii Herald, a local Japanese community newspaper, features an article on Yamanaka and reprints two poems, “Kala Gave Me Anykine Advice Especially About Filipinos When I Moved to Pahala” and “Boss of the Food.”

March 1994: Publication of the first article articulating the concerns of Hawai‘i Filipino communities. Bennette Evangelista’s “Killing Us Softly With These Words” appears in the Fil-Am Courier in response to the Hawaii Herald article.

April 1994: The AAAS Literature Award Committee announces its decision to present its 1993 award to Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre. The AAAS Filipino American Studies Caucus registers a complaint with the AAAS Board, objecting to Yamanaka’s portrayal of Filipino Americans. The award is given to Yamanaka, but the AAAS Board agrees to address issues of the marginalization of Filipino Americans within the Association.

Spring 1997: Publication of Blu’s Hanging.

April 1997: The 1996 AAAS Literature Award Committee nominates Yamanaka’s novel Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers for the Literature Award. The Filipino American Studies Caucus and others raise objections to this nomination based on their concerns about Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre and her newly released novel, Blu’s Hanging, and the Board decides not to give any Literature Awards that year. The Literature Award Committee resigns in protest. The President of the incoming Board, Yemen Le Espiritu, appoints a subcommittee to draft a policy regarding the relationship between the Board and the Awards Committee. The new bylaws stipulate that the Board no longer has ratification power over decisions made by the Book Awards Committee.

January 1, 1998: The Hawaii Herald features an article on Yamanaka.

January 16, 1998: Candace Fujikane’s “Blu’s Hanging and the Responsibilities Faced by Local Readers and Writers” appears in The Hawaii Herald in response to the ways that Filipino community concerns about the novel are being dismissed.

March 1998: The 1997 AAAS Fiction Award Committee announces its decision to present the Fiction Award to Yamanaka for Blu’s Hanging: Members of the Filipino American Studies Caucus and other AAAS members again ask the Committee and the Board to reevaluate their decision.

April 21, 1998: A letter of protest is sent to the AAAS Board by the University of Hawai‘i Ethnic Studies Department signed by faculty from the English, History, Filipino Languages and Literatures Departments and the School of Social Work.

May 1998: The AAAS Newsletter features a letter from AAAS President Espiritu presenting the AAAS history of the controversy over Yamanaka’s work and explaining that the AAAS Board does not have ratification power over the Award Committees’ decisions. Also featured were a letter from the Fiction Award Committee reaffirming its decision to present the award to Yamanaka and two responses by Linda Revilla and Jonathan Okamura protesting the award.

June 1998: Other letters protesting the award are sent to the board by seventeen UH undergraduate and graduate students on the 1998 AAAS Conference Planning Committee, by the thirty-seven members of the UH Pamatangas Council, an association of UH students, staff and faculty committed to fostering equal educational opportunity for Filipino Americans in the UH system, by members of the Filipino American Studies Caucus and the Anti-Racism Coalition, and by local Filipinos and their supporters in Hawai‘i and across the continent. Selected letters are later reprinted in The Fil-Am Courier (July 1–15 1998). Letters are also sent to the Board by eighty-two writers who support Yamanaka.

June 23–27, 1998: At the AAAS Conference in Honolulu, the Filipino American Studies Caucus and the Anti-Racism Coalition meet with the AAAS Board. Dean Alegado, represents the O‘ahu Filipino Community Council which is comprised of over fifty-eight organizations and presents its resolution protesting the award.
The Filipino American Studies Caucus and the Anti-Racism Coalition draft a resolution to be voted on by the membership. The resolution reads:

Whereas Article III, Part B of the Constitution of the Association for Asian American Studies states that among the founding purposes of the Association is "to promote better understanding and closer ties between and among various subcomponents within Asian American Studies;"

Whereas we as members of the Association for Asian American Studies condemn any form of censorship or silencing of voices in the Asian American and Pacific Islander communities,

Whereas the 3-member Fiction Award Committee's decision to honor Lois-Ann Yamanaka's novel Blu's Hanging with the 1997 Asian American Studies Fiction Award contradicts the purpose of the Association and further marginalizes and divides our Association,

Therefore, be it resolved that the general membership revokes the 1997 AAAS Fiction Award for Lois-Ann Yamanaka's Blu's Hanging.

June 26, 1998: AAAS Award Forum is held on the evening before the General Membership meeting.

June 27, 1998: When the Fiction Award for Blu's Hanging is presented at the General Membership meeting, members of the Caucus, the Coalition and their supporters, many wearing black armbands, rise, bow their heads, and turn their backs to the podium. Three of Yamanaka's former students, all Filipino American women in graduate school, accept the award on her behalf. Before the discussion of the resolution to rescind the Fiction Award, incoming Board President John Liu announces that both the current and incoming Boards are resigning to avoid liability because of the Association's unincorporated legal status. The sole exceptions are the current and incoming student representatives, Theo Gonzalez and Eric Tang respectively. Before the voting on the resolution, Ronald Takaki proposes a "friendly amendment" to the resolution, one that would keep the award intact but would put the Association on record as objecting to the book's contents. After some discussion, the Caucus rejects the proposal.

Voting is conducted by secret ballot. The final vote count is ninety-one in favor of the resolution to revoke the award, fifty-five against the resolution, and nineteen abstentions. Although it is not known exactly how many AAAS members are at the General Meeting, 494 registered for the Conference.

Notes

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1. I use "local" here as a geographical marker designating ethnic groups from Hawai'i, as in the organization "Local Japanese Women for Justice."


3. For a critique of Japanese political power in Hawai'i, see Ida Yoshinaga and Eiko Kosasa (2000) and Eiko Kosasa (2000).

4. In his essay "Authority, Intentionality, and Aesthetic Value in Asian American Cultural Politics," Mark Chiang (1999) revisits bourgeois notions of the aesthetic to explain the desire to separate aesthetics and politics in the Blu's Hanging controversy:

As many critics have argued, especially those working within the Marxist tradition of cultural analysis, the idea of the aesthetic is a feature of bourgeois society whose function is to resolve the contradiction between the liberal state's promise of formal equality in citizenship and the real political and economic conflicts in capitalist society. The aesthetic thus becomes the domain where the material inequalities and differences of the nation can be reconciled through their abstraction into components of a universal human essence... In order for the aesthetic to perform this function of reconciliation, then, it must remain uncontaminated by any trace of the realities of political conflict, hence the strict division that is insituted between the two spheres.

Paper delivered at the 16th Association for Asian American Studies Conference, Philadelphia, PA, April 1, 1999.

Lisa Lowe argues that Asian American literature resists the impulse to separate its aesthetics from the material contradictions of its production. See Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 44. In the case of Blu's Hanging, the problem, however, was precisely the resistance to acknowledging those contradictions.

7. For a discussion of the contradictions of a liberal democracy, see Lowe, 22–29.
10. See Lubiano, 361.
15. Many have argued that if Filipinos in Hawai‘i have a problem with Blu’s Hanging, then they should publish their own books. In these larger architectures of racism, however, not all writers have equal access to publication, and groups that are underrepresented in literature often find it difficult to publish their work.
16. The form letter was authored by David Mura (4 June 1998), and the letters from writers who used that template were distributed at the 1998 AAAS Conference.
20. Local Japanese do exercise political state power in Hawai‘i, but local Japanese protesters were actually critical of the way that the novel itself buttresses local Japanese positions of dominance in the state.
21. For references to the fatwa, see James, 92; for references to Dan Quayle, see Nadine Kam, “Writer’s blu’s,” Honolulu Star-Bulletin, August 1, 1994, B4.

References


Cordova, Joan May. 1999. E-mail to the author, October 29.


Making Yonsei

CARRIE Y. TAKAHATA

Mom,
what are you saying?
What'd you mean,
How come I don't know? and What kind
Japanese are you? Don't act
like I'm supposed to know these words. You
never told them to me before. You always said,
three not three
I am not I stay
like that not li-dat.

How am I supposed to know
anything but
Buddha's
not just the sculpture in our living room,
the one my friends made fun, he's a man
who sat under the bodhi tree and thought
thought

Call me at the office and if my secretary answers, give me a page; if I don't
answer within five
minutes, call my cell; I'll keep it on just    for    you,
you told me that.

You only use these words now
because you know your friend
likes them;
he thinks they're neat
and interesting.
I know what he wants.
He wants a little Local Japanese:
someone who will teach him
that this is

the makings of the family meal;
someone who'll buy him
the 10,000 strand red-paper-fire-crackers before
they go on sale at Longs;
someone who will show him just how to eat
the konbu for happiness,
the mochi to make the family stick,
the soba for long life;
someone who will open up the butsudan
and give him "mantras"??

He looks at you
and that's what he sees;
he looks at me
and wonders
what went wrong.

gohan not rice
chazuke not rice and tea
ko-ko not pickled cabbage

Uchinanchu Identity
in Hawai'i

NORMAN KANESHIRO

Asserting oneself as Okinawan or Uchinanchu in Hawai'i has been for
many a "juggling act" of various identities. The identity of Okinawans
in Okinawa has had a turbulent history and has become obscured by
the specter of Japanese national and cultural identity. Transmitted to Hawai'i,
this identity has become further marginalized by not only the prevalent "local"
Japanese American culture, but also by both local Hawai'i and American
cultures as well. Nonetheless, Uchinanchu in Hawai'i have been able to retain
a distinct identity and recently have witnessed a resurgence of pride in their
identity. However, Uchinanchu identity has taken on an infinite number of
forms among various individuals who define or redefine themselves as
Uchinanchu.

While there is a growing body of research in English on Okinawa itself,
studies of the enduring identities of Uchinanchu born in Hawai'i have been
few and far between. The only comprehensive work focusing on Uchinanchu
identity in Hawai'i available in English is Wesley Ueuten's master's thesis in
sociology (1989). While the scope of this article cannot present a complete
picture of Uchinanchu identity in Hawai'i, it is my goal to provide a basic
overview of that identity. The first half of the article will present a general
historical outline as background on the formation of Uchinanchu identity.
The second half will provide a contemporary view of Uchinanchu identity.
Due to the highly complex and personal nature of ethnic identity, it would be
impossible to present a definite theory of Uchinanchu identity. Thus, unlike
conventional research studies that seek to advance possible answers to hypoth-
eses, the objective of this article is to provide a general survey of Uchinanchu
ethnic identity ranging from its origins to the insights and perspectives of
individuals who currently claim that identity.

Early History of Okinawa

The Ryukyu Archipelago is a chain of islands that runs between Kyushu,
the southernmost major island of Japan, and Taiwan. Of the 73 islands that
make up this chain, Okinawa is the largest (Uenuten 1989:22). Before its forced annexation by Japan, the entire archipelago was known as the Ryukyu (also Liukiu or Loochoo) Kingdom. Excluding the Amami island group north of Okinawa, the rest of the former Ryukyu Kingdom became what we now know today as Okinawa Prefecture. For the purposes of this article, the terms “Ryukyu,” “Okinawa,” “Ryukyuan” and “Okinawan” will be used interchangeably in reference to the people or culture of the former Ryukyu Kingdom.

While no one can be certain of the precise origins of the Ryukyuan people, there are two dominant theories relating to this issue. One argument is that the Ryukyus were the main avenue through which Southeast Asian as well as other southern peoples and cultures (such as those from southern China and Melanesia) entered the Japan archipelago (Sakihara 1981:4). The second theory differentiates the Ryukyu islands into two cultural areas of which the northern region was more influenced by southern Japan and the southern region by Taiwan and the Philippines (Uenuten 1989:24).

In roughly the ninth or tenth century, hamlet societies of family clans began to emerge. These groups engaged in farming and animal husbandry. With population growth, different clans began to merge to form villages. These collections of clans were under the leadership of the niitche, the head male of the main pioneering household (Sakihara 1981:5). Identification with the village became a key factor in traditional Okinawan social structure. Throughout history, association outside the village was rare. Marriage was restricted to members of one’s village, and even the dialects used by neighboring villages would often be mutually unintelligible (Lebra 1980:114).

As their population increased, the village communities required more land. Struggles began to develop between villages for control of land. As certain villages acquired more land, the niitche became somewhat of a petty lord and his sphere of control grew. They built and lived in fortifications known as gusuku. A modern estimate points to the existence of between 200 and 300 gusuku across Okinawa and the neighboring islands (Sakihara 1981:56).

Through warfare and acquisition of land, the petty lords became increasingly more powerful until by the middle of the fourteenth century three powerful principalities emerged: Hokuzaun (north kingdom), Chuzan (central kingdom) and Nanzan (south kingdom). This period was marked by constant warring for supremacy. The fighting continued until 1429 when the middle kingdom of Chuzan toppled the other fiefdoms and unified Okinawa.

Building his capital city in Shuri, an area near the present capital of Naha, the Chuzan lord Sho Hashi declared himself the king of Ryukyu (Sakihara 1981:6-7). Though the islands were now united, the separate nature of the villages remained strong even into the twentieth century.

Trade with Neighboring Countries

While many indigenous practices exist, much of Okinawan culture is derived from contact with its neighboring countries, particularly China. In 1472, the Ryukyu Kingdom became an official tributary state of China. What this entailed was the sending of a delegation from Okinawa to the Chinese capital in Beijing twice a year in exchange for trading rights. China also sent 36 families to settle in Okinawa and spread Chinese learning and customs (Arakaki 1996:13). Chinese culture was further transmitted and reinforced by students sent to study in China, as well as by seamen and envoys who would often be in China for more than a year (Uenuten 1989:26). Robert Arakaki (1996:13) summarizes the significance of the relationship between China and Ryukyu:

Under the tributary system, China did not attempt to interfere with the internal administration of Okinawa. What mattered was the ceremonial and symbolic acceptance of Chinese superiority.... The significance of Okinawa’s tributary relationship is that it shows that the Okinawans were not considered Chinese.

This would be the beginning of a more than 500 year relationship from which Okinawan culture would benefit greatly. During the 1300s and 1400s, Okinawa became a major center of international trade. Okinawa’s tributary relationship with China and the expansion of China’s economy overseas allowed the small island kingdom to play a major role in international commerce. At this time, neither China nor Japan was engaged in maritime trade. Okinawa’s geographic location allowed it to serve as a vital trade link that bridged Southeast Asia with China, Korea and Japan. Okinawan trading ships traveled to places like Siam, Annam, Borneo, Luzon, Malacca, Sumatra and Malaysia. The trade that Okinawa conducted with all of these countries “brought unprecedented prosperity to the islands and enriched its cultural heritage” (Arakaki 1996:13). As a result of this contact, Okinawa became open to other cultures and borrowed freely from them (Arakaki 1996:15). It is because of this borrowing that Okinawan culture took on a form that was not completely Chinese nor fully Japanese. This period of prosperity is often called the “First Golden Age” because of the material and cultural wealth that
resulted. By the 1500s, however, the trade was no longer as lucrative as it once was. The entrance of Portuguese and Japanese traders replaced Okinawa's eminence in the Southeastern seas (Sakihara 1981:10). Nonetheless, the legacy of trade and exchange is still a source of pride for the Okinawan people today.

**Japanese Control of Okinawa**

Ryukyu's independence was severely restricted in 1609 when the Satsuma feudal domain in southern Japan, with the approval of the Tokugawa Shogun Ieyasu, invaded and forced a decree on the tiny kingdom that substantially limited its power as a sovereign entity (Arakaki 1996:17). Satsuma's official reason for the invasion was to mete out punishment for Ryukyu's lack of allegiance to the Tokugawa Shogunate (Ueunten 1989:28). In actuality, Satsuma and Tokugawa wanted access to Okinawa's trade with China. China had closed its doors to Japan after the Shogunate launched a failed attack on Korea, another tributary state of China. To access Chinese goods, Satsuma controlled Okinawa's foreign policy, but left the king in office to create a facade of normalcy for China. On top of this, Satsuma placed heavy taxes on the Okinawan people. To bolster its standing in the Japanese imperial court as the only local government to receive tribute from a foreign nation, Satsuma required the Ryukyuans to look and act Okinawan to emphasize their distinctiveness (Arakaki 1996:17). Beyond economic benefits, the feudal lord of Satsuma gained prestige in having subdued a foreign king. Basically, the more “exotic” the Ryukyuans appeared, the more Satsuma had to gain. Ryukyu's concurrent subordination to both Japan and China would last for the entirety of the Tokugawa period (Ueunten 1989:28–29).

Okinawan sovereignty came to an end in 1872 when the newly formed Meiji government in Tokyo issued a unilateral decree that ceded all power of government to Japan. In a push to make Okinawa conform to the rest of Japan, the monetary system and penal codes were changed. In 1879, Okinawa was made into a prefecture of Japan, and the king and his family were forced to live in the Japanese mainland (Arakaki 1996:19). Additional reforms were introduced to make Okinawa more “Japanese.”

From the beginning, it seemed that Okinawa was relegated to a second class status by Japan. Land reforms were completed 30 years later than in mainland Japan during which time Okinawans were fully taxed without representation in the National Diet. The balance between what the Okinawan people paid in taxes and what the central government spent on the prefecture was highly disparate. Ueunten (1989:32) points to an almost 200,000 yen deficit in government expenditures on Okinawa versus its tax payment in 1882. According to Sakihara (1981:14), “Okinawa's tax burden, twice that of other comparable prefectures, did not diminish in the following decades.” In addition to unfair taxation, the Okinawans' right to vote was largely limited. Voting laws that allowed citizens to elect parliamentary representatives were enacted in Okinawa in 1912, 22 years after they had been put into effect in mainland Japan. It was not until 1920 that Okinawans were allowed full participation in the electoral process (Ueunten 1989:32).

Probably the most devastating effect of Japanese control of Okinawa was the movement to force cultural assimilation upon the Okinawan people. In a push to create a strongly homogeneous society to mobilize its nationalization and modernization campaigns, the Japanese government was intolerant of nonconformity. The problem for Okinawans was that while the rest of the nation was already "Japanese" at the time of this movement for conformity, Okinawans essentially needed to shed their "Okinawaness" to become Japanese practically overnight. This situation produced a feeling of inferiority among Okinawans that was further reinforced by the educational system (Ueunten 1989:33–34). Sakihara (1981:16) summarizes the Japanese conformity movement for Okinawa:

> The government authorities attempted to eradicate local characteristics of Okinawa and imposed instead the so-called standard mores and language of Tokyo. Okinawan customs and manners were typically derided as “barbaric,” “backward,” and “unworthy of the subjects of the Emperor.” Children who spoke the Okinawan dialect at school were punished. It fostered a deep sense of inferiority toward local traditional culture. . .

There are countless stories of students being ridiculed by having to wear a sign around their neck, “I speak Okinawan,” and to stand facing the class or even near the school entrance where passing faculty members could slap them. Some accounts of ridicule by teachers for speaking Okinawan are as recent as the 1960s (personal communication). Suppression of the Okinawan language has been largely effective since only a very small handful of young people from rural areas still speak it.

**Okinawan-Naïchi Immigrant Relations in Hawai‘i**

The history of the relationship between Okinawan and Naïchi (people of mainland Japanese descent) immigrants is one of separation and animosity. Of this relation, Henry Toyama and Kiyoshi Ikeda write (1981:128):
The relationship between the Okinawans and the Naichi in Hawai‘i is somewhat like that between the Irish and the English: one group feeling superior to the other, and the other having a defensive pride. The situation is also comparable to the Jewish-Gentile relationship in that there are very seldom manifest dangerous, overt feelings, the attitudes being mainly covert.

Not only did Okinawan immigrants bear the weight of the history of Japanese oppression, they faced a new kind of discrimination in Hawai‘i. By the time the first immigrants arrived from Okinawa in 1900, the Japanese community was already well established. With a population of more than 60,000, Japanese accounted for almost 40 percent of the Hawai‘i population (Lebra 1980:117). Although by 1911 the number of Okinawans was more than 10,000, they remained a "minority within a minority." There were several distinguishing traits that set Okinawans apart from Naichi. The biggest difference was language. Many Okinawans could not speak standard Japanese very well, if at all. Since they could not communicate effectively with the "other Japanese," they generally stayed among themselves. Also, certain physical features of Okinawans were markedly different from those of Naichi. While almost indistinguishable to other groups, to Naichi, Okinawans tended to be shorter in stature and more hirsute. William Lebra (1980:112) writes: "According to one account, because of the difference in the fashioning of their sandals, Okinawans tended to walk with their toes pointed outward, while that of the Naichijin pointed inward." Okinawan dress and hairstyles were also very distinguishable from Japanese types. Probably one of the most noticeable traits were the tattoos on the hands of Okinawan women. According to Lebra, in Japan tattooing practices were associated with criminals and outcasts.

Due to their perception as the "other," Okinawans were either ostracized or mistreated by Naichi. On the plantations, a common complaint among Okinawans was that Naichi would appropriate the better jobs and leave the dirty, undesirable work for them. Also, because Okinawans were known to raise pigs and eat pork (raising and slaughtering pigs or other livestock was associated with the eta or outcast class in Japan), Naichi would use derogatory phrases like "Okinawa-ken buta kau kau" ("Okinawans eat pigs"). Even children would learn this type of behavior and adopt their parents' prejudices. Concerning the negative stereotyping and name calling that Okinawans endured, Lebra (1980:123) writes:

Needless to say, these were deeply wounding to the smaller group who largely bore them in silence, for there was no one to turn to but each other. And, of course, the tightening of their ranks and increased mutual support only served to strengthen the stereotypic charge that "they always stick together." Because the Okinawans were subject to discrimination, their own sense of ethnic consciousness is said to have developed, and both issei and nisei tended to have inferiority complexes (Kohatsu 1951).

The ill treatment by Naichi would drive Okinawans to turn to each other and create a strong sense of unity among themselves. While the village and town affiliations remained strong, Okinawans could not afford to separate themselves as they tended to do back home.

While historical and cultural differences were probably the greatest cause of Naichi discrimination against Okinawans, Sakihara points to yet another reason. From the viewpoint of the Japanese government, it seemed Okinawans were considered “inferior immigrants, something that no one was happy about, and a stain upon the good name of the Japanese people” (Sakihara 1975:59). Okinawans tended not to settle for long at any one plantation. They also tended to be active in unions and participated in strikes and were said to cause labor disturbances. Finally, Okinawans made up the largest number of "Japanese" workers to leave the plantations; in 1919 they constituted 70 percent of all plantation leavers. Japanese bureaucrats despised Okinawans for their conduct as "inferior immigrants" because they did not cower from the oppression of their plantation employers (Sakihara 1975:60–61).

The name calling and discrimination by Naichi would take their toll on Okinawans. Comparing Okinawans with Naichi, Toyama and Ikeda (1981:130) write:

The Naichi have a culture of which they are proud, while the Okinawans, on the other hand, have until recently suffered from a sense of inferiority owing to their "peculiar" cultural practices and institutions. The Okinawans in Hawai‘i have had the double problem of adjusting to Naichi culture as well as to American culture, with all of the maladjustments and disorganization attendant upon this transition.

There are countless stories of how Okinawan immigrants and their children would hide their identity as much as possible. Certain families would even go to the extent of changing or "Japanizing" their last names. Often, use of the language or customs and practices of the homeland were hidden away in the home, if not completely discarded (Ueutente 1989:37). The idea that anything Japanese was superior to their "lowly, rural" ways became pervasive among Okinawans. For many, denying their Okinawan identity and becoming Japanese were really the only way of getting ahead in Hawai‘i.
As intense as the segregation between Naichi and Okinawan immigrants was, it did not carry over to succeeding generations of both groups born in Hawai‘i. This became noticeable largely after World War II when the Hawaii-born Nisei or second generation of both groups came of age and replaced their Japan-born Issei parents in social importance. The significant factor was that both groups grew up together in Hawai‘i and developed stronger ties to the islands rather than to their parents’ homelands. Ueunten (1989:41) points out three sets of “shared experiences” that helped to end the division between the two groups: 1) growing up in the same neighborhoods and attending the same schools; 2) working together during the war, either on the battlefield or at home fueling the war effort; and 3) being “second-class citizens under Nazi rule in Hawaii.” These common experiences helped to build a bridge between the two groups that put an end to the visible antagonism between Uchinanchu and Naichi. Nonetheless, the memory and the effects of that antagonism have had a lasting and profound impact on succeeding generations of Uchinanchu in Hawai‘i.

Okinawan Organizations

The Issei or first generation immigrants from Okinawa brought with them their strong attachment to their separate localities back home. The first locality club was organized in 1908. However, most of the locality clubs find their origins in the 1920s and 1930s when Okinawan immigrants began to move from the plantations to urban jobs, particularly in Honolulu. The separate nature of the localities in Okinawa is evident in the fact that all efforts to establish an all-Okinawan organization or club failed prior to 1951 (Ueunten 1989:50).

The main purpose of the locality clubs was to create a mutual aid network as well as to foster fellowship among individuals and families who shared a common origin in order to “facilitate their adjustment in the new country by cushioning the shock of disagreeable new experiences” (Kimura 1962:15). The main functions of the clubs included helping at members’ funerals and holding social gatherings such as picnics and New Year’s parties (Ueunten 1989:51). The clubs also received dignitaries and special guests from Okinawa and sponsored performing troupes to the islands (Kimura 1962:16). A major role of the clubs was their facilitation of the sanemashi or moat, a type of rotating credit system where money was pooled which allowed members to leave the plantations and undertake other endeavors including opening up businesses or pursuing education (Sakihara 1975:61). In general, the familiar ties of common origin strengthened “their morale and in-group cohesion, thus enabling [Okinawans] to withstand ostracism from the non-Okinawan out-group” (Kimura 1962:15).

The locality clubs remained separate until finally in 1951 the United Okinawan Association (UOA) was formed with fourteen clubs as charter members. This umbrella organization was originally formed to coordinate relief efforts to Okinawa after its devastation during World War II. The UOA also focused on social and economic advancement of Okinawans in both Hawai‘i and Okinawa (Ueunten 1989:48).

While the original functions of the UOA (today known as the HUOA or Hawaii United Okinawa Association) and the locality clubs were basically social and economic, the changing face of the Uchinanchu population in Hawai‘i led to a shift in the focus of these organizations. The fact that the Nisei and succeeding generations were born and raised in the islands meant a much weaker tie to Okinawa and stronger ties to Hawai‘i and networks within the local population. Also, the economic prosperity in Okinawa no longer made aid from Hawai‘i necessary. Finally, the relative success of Hawai‘i’s Uchinanchu in education, business and politics by the 1970s and 1980s no longer necessitated the mutual aid function of the locality clubs or the UOA. As a result, the organizations, particularly the UOA, became more culturally oriented. It seems that a new trend in the general Japanese American population was to seek out one’s cultural background. Ueunten (1989:49) explains this phenomenon: “The relative success of Japanese-Americans in Hawaii gave sansei and yonsei, who had reached young adulthood in the 1970s and 1980s, the time and resources to look for their ‘roots’ as many other people of immigrant background in the United States were doing.” The UOA began undertaking projects such as the sponsorship of “study tours” to Okinawa in the late 1970s and the compilation of a history of Okinawans in Hawai‘i in conjunction with the University of Hawai‘i Ethnic Studies Oral History Project in 1981. Probably the most visible expression of Okinawan culture in Hawai‘i is the annual Okinawan Festival that was first organized by the UOA in 1982. Originally held at McCoy Pavilion at Ala Moana Park, the festival soon outgrew that facility and in 1985 was moved to Thomas Square. It has grown so large that it is presently held each year at Kapalolani Park. The Okinawan Festival has become an icon for Okinawan culture not only for local Uchinanchu but for the entire Hawai‘i community.
Toward Reconstruction

A survey of the history of Okinawa and of the relationship between Okinawan and Naichi immigrants can help to develop a clearer understanding of Uchinanchu identity in Hawai‘i and its dynamics. Four main points concerning Uchinanchu identity can be derived from this historical review: 1) the Okinawan culture and people developed very much on their own and are unique; 2) Japanese “colonialism” has served to obscure Uchinanchu identity; 3) poor relations with the Naichi community in Hawai‘i forced Okinawans to unite themselves; and 4) oppression by the Naichi has served to obscure further Uchinanchu identity. The main component of Uchinanchu identity has always been the deeply rooted need to separate and distinguish itself from Japanese identity.

In recent years, a resurgence of pride and awareness of Uchinanchu identity has developed within the community. The younger generations draw upon the history and culture of Okinawa and the legacy of suffering as a basis for their identity and as a source of pride. Once a source of shame, Uchinanchu identity is now celebrated, especially through the perpetuation of cultural performing arts.

A primary reason that some scholars emphasize for this reawakening of Uchinanchu pride is the affluence the post-immigration generations have gained. William Lebra (1980:124) points to World War II as the main impetus of this rise to affluence: “The once disdainfully regarded pig farmer who had collected garbage from restaurants and hotels was now viewed as working in a vital war industry.” Not only pig farmers but also agriculturalists saw prosperity in this period as well. Lebra also notes that local Okinawan leaders were not interned as were some Naichi leaders. With the money from this economic boom period, several Okinawans were able to invest in businesses and property (Lebra 1980:125). With a new affluence in the Japanese American community and the local community at large, Okinawans were able to gain a new respect. As the larger community began to view Okinawans in a more positive light, they themselves began to gain a new sense of pride. Arakaki (1996:7) sums up this dynamic: “As a student of political science I am aware of the fact that the ‘forgetting’ and ‘remembering’ of one’s ethnic identity very often reflect changing power relations.”

Uchinanchu Identity among Individuals

Although the historical and factual profile of a group can help one to develop an understanding of its collective identity or identity trends among members of the group, it is really only half of the picture. Identity is something that is extremely complex and personal. Profiling tends to paint a group of people as a singular unit, sometimes neglecting the fact that a group is actually a collection of individuals. In all of the previous sections of this article, Uchinanchu or Okinawans born in Hawai‘i have been identified as a group. While there are many people who share this identity, the ways in which they define themselves and the ways they choose to express their identity are very unique. Beyond the issue of place of birth, the ethnic lines are further blurred by outmarriage of Uchinanchu with Naichi and other ethnicities. In spite of these unclear ethnic boundaries, there are many people who cling to their Uchinanchu identity.

For this section, four individuals born in Hawai‘i who all claim Uchinanchu identity were interviewed. Each person has been an active participant in learning Okinawan culture and has been to Okinawa at least once. The similarities, however, end there. These individuals not only differ in ethnic composition, but in their self definition, their expression of their heritage, and their relationship to Okinawa. By comparing and contrasting these individuals’ insights and perspectives, it will become clear that Uchinanchu identity is by no means a singular concept.

J.A. is 31 years old and was born on O‘ahu. While her father is a Nisei, her mother was born and raised in Okinawa. J.A.'s cultural activities include Okinawan dance, taiko drumming, and participation in her locality club. She has been to Okinawa once for almost two weeks.

R.Y. is also 31 years old and from O‘ahu. Like J.A., his mother was born and raised in Okinawa. Unlike J.A., however, his father is a Sansei Naichi. R.Y.’s main cultural activity is learning Okinawan music. While he has taken several short trips to Okinawa throughout his life, R.Y. lived in Okinawa for one year on a scholarship at the Performing Arts University of the Ryukyus.

Like R.Y., E.W. is half Naichi and half Okinawan. His father was a Nisei Naichi, while his mother is a full Okinawan Sansei. E.W. is 36 years old and from O‘ahu. While he is proficient in playing Okinawan music, E.W. also is a teacher of Okinawan dance. He too has been to Okinawa several times, including two one-year stays. E.W. also attended the Performing Arts University of the Ryukyus for one year on a scholarship.

K.S. is the most ethnically diverse of the interviewees. While his father is a full Okinawan Sansei, his mother was a mixture of Portuguese, German
and Hawaiian. He is 45 years old and is from O'ahu. K.S. has been a student of Okinawan dance for more than seventeen years and was an active member of various Uchinanchu organizations. He has visited Okinawa five times but has never stayed longer than a few weeks at a time.

Identity in Early Years

With the exception of K.S., each of the other three interviewees had early exposure to Okinawan culture and identity. As far back as they could remember, J.A., R.Y. and E.W. somehow understood that they were, at least in part, Uchinanchu and had been exposed to aspects of the culture since an early age. For R.Y. and J.A., the fact that their mothers were from Okinawa seemed to be a significant factor in their identities. Both of them claimed that they knew their mothers were unique because they were not “from here.” J.A. explained of her mother, “[I] always knew from an early age...that my mother was from this place [Okinawa], and of course she talks differently, and she not only talks Japanese but she talks Okinawan.” While R.Y. knew that his mother spoke a different language on the phone at times, he was not aware until later that she was speaking Okinawan rather than Japanese.

Though J.A.’s mother was an important factor in her identity, it was her father’s parents who seemed to reinforce it. J.A. said that her grandparents spoke Okinawan in the home, played Okinawan music on the radio and watched Okinawan television programs. More importantly, they stressed the differences between Japanese and Okinawans to J.A. and would identify people in the community who were Uchinanchu. To J.A., being Uchinanchu just “seemed natural.”

For R.Y., it was a little different. While he knew there was a difference between his father’s side and his mother’s side of the family, he did not differentiate between Okinawan and Naichi. As a child, he separated the two sides as one being “local Japanese,” while the other was “Japan Japanese.” Not only did R.Y.’s mother speak on the phone with his relatives, but these relatives would also come to visit them in Hawai‘i and, in turn, he and his family would go to visit them in Okinawa. While he did not identify his mother’s family as Uchinanchu, R.Y. said he always felt a closer bond to that side of the family than to his father’s relatives: “Even though [my father’s relatives] are this close, on the same island, they seem farther away than my relatives in Okinawa.”

Though his grandmother and mother were both born in Hawai‘i, E.W.’s childhood was also heavily influenced by the Uchinanchu part of his family.

As a child, E.W. had frequent contact with his great-grandmother in ‘Ewa who was from Okinawa. Also, his grandfather would play reel-to-reel tapes of Okinawan music in their home. In addition, many of his relatives, including his grandmother, had gone to Okinawa and had stories to tell of their stays there as well as descriptions of their relatives overseas. Also, E.W.’s family were active participants in local Okinawan events such as bon dances, picnics and performances. As was the case with R.Y., E.W. also said that he had closer ties to his Uchinanchu family which, unlike his father’s family, got together on a regular basis.

In contrast to the other three interviewees, K.S. had little contact with his Okinawan heritage. As a child, K.S. said that he thought his Asian ethnicity was Japanese. Though he spent time with his Okinawan grandmother (who was from Okinawa), like R.Y., he thought that she was just Japanese. Unlike the other three interviewees, K.S. had the “problem” of being called a “haole” by his classmates in school because of his Caucasian appearance. Also, he recalled the surprise of teachers who called his Okinawan surname at roll and found it belonged to a Caucasian-looking child. At that time, K.S. recalled that he knew he was part Caucasian but was also part Hawaiian and Asian and thus denied being haole. It was not until his early adolescent years that K.S. began to realize that his “Asian side” was actually Okinawan and not Japanese when his Uchinanchu classmates began telling him about the differences between Uchinanchu and Naichi.

Attachment through Cultural Arts

Though each of the individuals interviewed shares an interest in Okinawan cultural arts, their personal attachment to their respective art and what it means for their self identity are unique. J.A.’s main reason for being involved with Okinawan cultural arts is a very personal one. When she was nine years old, her mother passed away. According to J.A., being involved with Okinawan culture “make[s me feel connected to her somehow, doing something that is part of who she is, where she’s from.” Beyond maintaining a connection to her mother’s memory, J.A. also attributes her attachment to Okinawan culture to a personal connection within herself. Being raised around the Okinawan language, food and music, it is like a natural part of her being. She stated that she could have chosen other hobbies, but the reason why she chose Okinawan cultural activities is because she claims, “I feel like it’s a part of me, part of my mom and my grandparents, just part of being who I am.” Also, while some people may practice cultural arts as a way of becoming more attached to their
cultural heritage, it is the opposite for J.A.: “I don’t think I do [Okinawan cultural activities] to form a stronger attachment; I think it’s because I have a strong attachment that I do it. . . . When you hear the music. . . it makes you feel something inside.”

E.W.’s connection to Okinawan arts bears striking similarities to J.A.’s attachment. He too grew up surrounded by Okinawan culture. Of his interest in learning cultural arts, E.W. explained, “I don’t know if you can call it natural, but it was just because I was brought up in that kind of atmosphere where we always went [to family gatherings on the Okinawan side].” Urged by his mother, E.W. began taking Okinawan dance lessons at age five. However, he did not like the children’s dances he was being taught because they made him feel foolish, so he quit after a year. Even after quitting, E.W. explained that he never lost touch with the music or dance; he still remained interested in watching music and dance performances and always thought about going back to lessons. Finally, when he became a sophomore in high school, E.W. returned to his dance teacher. Not long after, he began training in Okinawa that would continue for the next eighteen years, and he eventually earned certification as a junior-level instructor to teach in Hawai‘i. Similar to J.A., E.W. also was motivated by the memory of a deceased loved one: “After my great-grandmother passed away, I felt some kind of obligation to continue the culture. . . . it’s like part of her was kind of living or continued living.” Besides his great-grandmother, E.W. also was inspired by a sense of obligation to all of the Issai, who had worked hard and faced so much oppression, to continue their ways and culture. Finally, E.W. is also driven by a sense of obligation to bring justice to the art form he is studying. According to him, only by going to the heartland of the culture can one fully learn to master the art. He said that he feels a need to share what he has learned and to give others a chance to learn what he has learned without having to spend the money or go through the challenges he had to face making so many trips to Okinawa.

The need to bring integrity to the art form is something that drives R.Y. also. Unlike E.W. and J.A., R.Y. has only come to define himself as Uchinanchu within the past five to six years. Until that time, he related more to being a Hawai‘i-born person but also identified himself as an American and as a person of Japanese descent. In contrast to J.A. and E.W. who felt that it was natural to take up Okinawan cultural arts, R.Y. began learning Okinawan music as a way of getting in touch with his roots. His interest was sparked when he suddenly began to wonder about Okinawan spirituality. In his search for answers, he came to realize the differences between Naichi and Okinawans and practically stumbled upon his identity. “Discovering” his Uchinanchu identity was like “finding that brother or sister you never had.” Similar to J.A. and E.W. but to a lesser degree, being unconsciously surrounded by people from Okinawa, the language and culture helped to create a strong sense of attachment to the arts for R.Y. He had always been a music lover but says Okinawan music was “closer to his identity” compared with American or Hawaiian music. Even though he was not aware of it, the music and culture were “always in the background.” As with E.W., R.Y. feels a need to enhance the integrity of Okinawan arts in Hawai‘i. Only by studying in Okinawa, he claims, can one develop a deeper understanding of the music and culture in general. R.Y. is also driven by a need to share what he has learned in Okinawa.

While K.S. shares a strong cultural connection to Okinawa, unlike the other three interviewees, he points to a more organic relationship. Like R.Y., K.S. was not aware of his Uchinanchu identity until later in life. Though he was aware of the differences between Okinawans and Naichi by the time he was in high school, K.S. did not become active in expressing his Uchinanchu identity until he was 25 years old. Two events led him to develop an interest in the cultural arts of Okinawa. K.S. had received his grandmother’s sanshin (Okinawan snakeskin “banjo”). K.S. said that when he received the instrument, he felt that he needed to “bring it to life again” and decided to take lessons. When his father, who is full Okinawan, found out K.S. had begun taking lessons, he questioned his son, “Why do you want to learn that? . . . That’s old.” To this K.S. recalled replying, “That’s why I wanted to learn it, because it’s old.” Another event at this time had an even stronger impact on K.S.’s attachment to Okinawan culture. He was asked by his family to find Okinawan dancers for his grandmother’s birthday party. K.S. contacted the University of Hawai‘i and was referred to a master musician who in turn set up the entertainment for the party. At the party, K.S. remembered being moved by the dances. His experience at the party led him to begin taking Okinawan dance lessons that would continue for the next eighteen years. K.S. attributes his interest to some “innate” force inside of him that was stirred by his watching the dances for the first time. Like R.Y., K.S. went into dance not only because he liked it but also to connect with his Uchinanchu heritage. Another motivation for taking up an Okinawan cultural activity for K.S. was as a way to express his Asian background and gain acceptance. Unlike the other interviewees, K.S. is part Caucasian and does not appear fully Asian. He claimed that deep inside, he always felt that he was Asian but was never fully accepted as one because of his physical appearance. “So I thought,” K.S.
recalled, "if I delved more into [being Okinawan], maybe [the other Asians] would accept me." Unfortunately, K.S. came to realize that "no matter what, I cannot be like that." Nonetheless, his continuing interest in Okinawan culture has led him to Okinawa five times in his life.

Cultural "Pilgrimage" to Okinawa

All four interviewees have spent varying amounts of time in Okinawa. For each of them, many of the trips were dedicated to retracing roots to family and to their cultural heritage. The impact of their travels to Okinawa, however, differs greatly from person to person.

J.A. traveled to Okinawa once a few years ago for almost two weeks. For her, this trip was mainly to establish ties with her mother's family. J.A. recalls, "When I got there, I felt connected to the place, I don't know if that's just because of my mom or what...I felt like it was like a second home." She said that she was very well received by her relatives with whom her mother had kept close contact. Despite the language barrier—J.A. could understand much more Japanese than she could speak—she did not feel distanced or separated from her family there. While this trip did not profoundly affect her Uchinanchu identity, one thing that stuck out in her memory was the way in which her cousins there found it amusing or even odd that she was so interested in Okinawan culture. This made J.A. wonder why it is that these people who live there do not practice their own culture, while people far across the sea in Hawai'i try so hard to practice it.

Like J.A., R.Y.'s mother kept close contact with her family in Okinawa. R.Y. recalled taking trips to Okinawa from an early age. As with J.A., his close ties to his relatives there made Okinawa a "home away from home." Unlike J.A., however, during his early trips to Okinawa, R.Y. did not conceive the islands to be separate or different from Japan. As a child, "going to Okinawa" literally meant "going to Japan." When R.Y. developed an interest in finding out about his Uchinanchu roots, he soon decided to take advantage of a scholarship that would send him to Okinawa for a year. Before he left, R.Y. had been taking Okinawan music lessons in Hawai'i. His main motivation was to develop a deeper understanding of the music and the culture itself: "In Hawai'i, everyone only has a surface understanding of Okinawa; it's not a really deep understanding. I think you have to live there to understand how they really live." R.Y. felt that the "Okinawan culture" he was learning in Hawai'i was tainted by Japanese culture, American culture, and local culture. In order to get a purer extraction, he felt immersion in the "homeland" was necessary. Like J.A., however, R.Y. also found that his own cousins found it strange that he was so interested in Okinawan traditional culture. R.Y. recalled that he thought it to be such a waste that people who live there and have access to so much do not have the interest to pursue learning the culture as he struggles to do so.

R.Y.'s stay in Okinawa did help him gain a fuller knowledge and understanding of Okinawan culture. It also solidified in his mind the separateness of Japan and Okinawa. It was during this time that he clearly defined his identity as Uchinanchu over "Japanese." However, the year in Okinawa also made R.Y. realize how "Okinawan" he was not. While it did give him insight into his Okinawan roots, being a foreigner in a foreign country made him realize how American or local he really was: "When I think of all the things I...missed...[it] kind of made me realize that [Hawai'i] is my real home...Being there I couldn't really be a part of that culture and made me realize that I feel more strongly about Hawai'i." R.Y. noted that there was a paradox in the fact that while he appeared as an "insider" in Okinawa, he was actually very foreign.

Like J.A. and R.Y., K.S. was fortunate to have a family member with close ties to Okinawa. His grandmother kept in contact with her family there, and so K.S. was able to develop a very close relationship with them during his first and subsequent visits to Okinawa. K.S.'s first trip to Okinawa was also to establish ties with his family and to see the place where his grandmother was born. By this time, K.S. had begun learning Okinawan dance and was interested in learning more about the arts and history. Learning more about the history and seeing many of the sights in Okinawa impressed K.S. and developed within him a stronger sense of pride in being Uchinanchu. Especially after seeing the castle ruins and historical sites, it made him "feel good to be...a part of these people that created all these things." Not only did the sites impress K.S., but the stories his relatives told, particularly of life during the war, moved him. Hearing of the tribulations of civilians during the Battle of Okinawa made him feel proud that his own relatives were so resilient and able to survive.

While K.S. claimed he never felt distant from his relatives in Okinawa, he did say that everyone else around him would stare. He speculated that they could not make out what he was, whether he was in the military or "one of them." Before going to Okinawa, he had decided that he was "Uchinanchu,
but Uchinanchu from Hawai'i...not a national." According to K.S., it is because of this strong resolve that he was not bothered by the strange looks he attracted from people around him. He also stated that being a student of Okinawan dance made for a strong link to Okinawa and helped him feel like more of an "insider." He felt being a practitioner of "their" art was a good way to be accepted as well. K.S. was so drawn by the dance that he even considered living in Okinawa for a long period of time to study.

Of the four people interviewed, E.W. has spent the most time in Okinawa. While his short stays are too numerous to count, he also has lived in Okinawa for two one-year stretches. Like R.Y. and J.A., E.W.'s family maintained close ties with relatives in Okinawa. In fact, part of the purpose of his first trip was to retrieve the remains of old relatives that were to be left in the care of his family in Hawai'i. This trip coincided with E.W.'s study tour—the other purpose of his first trip. By this time, he had been learning Okinawan dance in Hawai'i and had been studying the history of his ancestors' homeland. E.W. found himself surrounded by culture in Okinawa—dance studios practically on every other block, Okinawan music in the streets, stores selling cultural goods, and women still wearing traditional hairstyles and clothing with tattoos on their hands. His first impression of these sights was "like everything I saw in my great-grandmother was there a hundred times more."

During this first trip, E.W. was introduced to a popular dance master in Okinawa who took him under her wing. He extended his stay an extra four months to do intensive study under this master and eventually received the first of three levels of certification in Okinawan classical dance. After studying in Okinawa, E.W. was determined to complete all three levels of certification (available only in Okinawa) and to continue his "authentic" training. He said that it became important for him to be in the place where the art originated to truly grasp its essence so he would be able to pass on the "authentic" form to others. The comfortable climate and his determination to continue his studies led him to Okinawa at every opportunity he could grasp. Like R.Y., E.W. was eventually able to receive a full one-year scholarship to the Performing Arts University of the Ryukyus. Rather than diminish, his "hunger" for knowledge and perfection of classical dance grew stronger. Unlike R.Y., during this first one-year stay, E.W. said he felt very much a part of the society. At this point, he had even considered making his home in Okinawa. He was able to return to live in Okinawa for another year a few years after his scholarship ended. This time it was to work as a manager and advisor for a Hawaiian-style restaurant.

While E.W. claimed he never felt any kind of cultural/identity conflicts during his previous stays, during this stay he did. During this period, E.W. became part of the "everyday community" in Okinawa and lived as they did. He said that the longer he lived and worked there, the more he felt like an outsider. A significant factor was the segregation he felt from the people with whom he worked. One poignant memory was a statement the head chef of the restaurant made about not wanting the restaurant to become a "Hawaiian clubhouse." E.W. said that this really began to separate him from the people of Okinawa: "I guess it really opened my eyes for me to realize that I can never be like them because we're brought up differently; our thinking is different, society in general is just different."

Disillusioned by his experience in Okinawa, E.W. built a stronger identity with his home in Hawai'i and felt distanced from his Uchinanchu identity: "I know I can't get rid of the blood, so I'm always going to be of Japanese-Okinawan ancestry, but I think as far as my roots, because I was born here in Hawai'i, there's that part of me that's going to be...Hawaiian American." Though E.W. is still teaching Okinawan dance, he has since joined a hula hālau and has begun studying Hawaiian culture and history.

Conclusion

The concept of ethnic identity is a very complex issue, particularly because it is so highly personal in interpretation and expression. For Uchinanchu in Hawai'i, the problem is multiplied by the number of identities from which they can choose. While it seems that the younger generations of Uchinanchu are becoming more absorbed into the larger American and local communities, there is little indication that the growing interest in their roots will end anytime soon. Nonetheless, while Uchinanchu are unified by a single collective identity, there are no strict rules that clearly define its boundaries. Thus, within the group we call "Uchinanchu" is a large range of individuals with varying degrees of identification and association. What form Uchinanchu identity will take in the future will only be seen with time.

Notes

1. In this article, "Okinawan" will be used to denote people in or from Okinawa and "Uchinanchu" to denote Hawai'i-born Okinawans.
References


Mixing the Plate:
Performing Japanese American Identity on the Stage of the Cherry Blossom Festival Queen Pageant in Honolulu, Hawai‘i

CHRISTINE R. YANO

Beauty contests crystallize social processes and ideologies of identity through the lens of gender and collectivity. This holds true in the Cherry Blossom Festival (CBF) Queen Pageant, a Japanese American event that has taken place yearly in Honolulu, Hawai‘i for the past 50 years. The ties between the queens such ethnic contests crown and the groups those queens are meant to represent bind the public in ways that make beauty contests grand spectacles of identity. Manning defines spectacle as “a large-scale, extravagant cultural production that is replete with striking visual imagery and dramatic action and that is watched by a mass audience” (1992:291). Furthermore, spectacles become “the principal symbolic context in which contemporary societies enact and communicate their guiding beliefs, values, concerns, and self understandings” (ibid.). It is exactly in this sense that beauty contests may be considered spectacles. They are historically situated means of communicating fundamental beliefs and values of race/ethnicity, community, and femininity. Cohen et al. (1996:2) suggest that as universal and diverse as beauty contests are, what they do is remarkably similar. . . . They showcase values, concepts, and behavior that exist at the center of a group’s sense of itself and exhibit values of morality, gender, and place. . . . The beauty contest stage is where identities (local, ethnic, regional, national, international) and cultures can be—and frequently are—made public and visible.

Beauty contests draw upon idioms of prestige—even royalty—in their quest to make identity “public and visible.” In doing so, they endow winners with temporary imitative rewards: the physical accoutrements of crown, sceptre,
and cape (although typically of far less monetary value than those of actual royalty); the sociocultural accoutrements of the spotlight and access to those in power, while not necessarily possessing that power (cf. McClintock 1995).

The winner of a beauty contest becomes the subject of intense interest and critical gaze. One reason for this public interest is that beauty contests display purported exemplars of female purity, virginity, and sexuality in critical marriage-market scrutiny. Not only are there typically age restrictions in contests, but there are also moral restrictions, eliminating divorcees and mothers of out-of-wedlock children from competition. They constitute what Arjun Appadurai (1986:21) has called "tournaments of value":

complex periodic events that are removed in some culturally well-defined way from the routines of economic life. Participation in them is likely to be both a privilege of those in power and an instrument of status contests between them.... What is at issue in such tournaments is not just status, rank, fame, or reputation of actors, but the disposition of the central tokens of value in ordinary life.

Beauty contests, thus, are about women as "central tokens of value" (even as they receive tokens of value as part of their prize), invoking issues of power and prestige. The potential for conflict always runs just below the surface (e.g., questions about the fairness of judging, the worthiness of the winners, the catfighting of losers). In particular, it is drama between and about women, if even as controlled by men. Beauty contests become the public peep hole upon our sisters, daughters, and future wives.

Furthermore, beauty contests often become the site of disagreement on a larger scale. Cohen et al. (1996:2) write:

By choosing an individual whose deportment, appearance, and style embodies the values and goals of a nation, locality, or group, beauty contests expose these same values and goals to interpretation and challenge. This sort of opening or rupture happens... when local opinions diverge over who should win and why.... Beauty contests provide opportunities for public expression and negotiation of standards and values.

The choice of winner, then, is more than about looks; it involves issues of representation. The stakes run high because the winner represents nothing less than the group itself. She becomes a story we tell about ourselves to ourselves, as well as a story we tell to others. As much as beauty contests appear ostensibly to be about women, in many instances they become, more importantly, about the men these women represent. As Munn has written about shells in kula exchange, so, too, might the same be said for women in beauty contests: "Although men appear to be the agents in defining shell value, in fact, without shells, men cannot define their own value; in this respect, shells and men are reciprocally agents of each other's value definition" (quoted in Appadurai 1986:20). Thus, men in control of beauty contests define women's value, at the same time as women by their display define men's value. The daughter on stage represents the father (and mother) seated in the audience, just as the queen in public represents the men who organize the contest. What might be interpreted symbolically as family dynamics reinserts a patriarchal system of gender display. Women become the interface between male-dominated organizations and the public. The question is not, then, who gets to enact the story but, more importantly, who gets to decide on the story.

Moreover, the notion of a beauty contest has for decades been such a pejorative that many "beauty contests" have become officially "scholarship pageants" or simply "pageants" or, as in the contest I analyze here, "ethnic-cultural pageants," disclaiming competition based solely on appearance.1 Indeed, some contests, including the CBF Queen Pageant, have reduced the percentage of possible points awarded to appearance. Even winners often distance themselves from beauty contests by claiming that they are not the "typical beauty queen." By this, they suggest that a "typical beauty queen"—that is, one who epitomizes the notion of a beauty contest—presents an overtly-feminized demeanor and personality. In the case of ethnic-cultural pageants, this version of femininity is tied to processes of cultural tradition and identity-making.

These issues become all the more critical when the group being represented is not a national or community group but a racial/ethnic one, particularly in a multietnic setting like Hawai‘i that includes persons of mixed-blood. When the stage reflects that mixing—in other words, when mixed-blood contestants vie and win, as in the case of this Japanese American pageant since 19992—then the issues become even more complex. Furthermore, even when the stage includes only pure-blood contestants, rumors of hidden and possible mixings suggest that problems inherent in representation have and always will be there. In part, this is a problem of constructing identities around nebulous ties of ancestry, heritage, and practices unevenly remembered. In part, this is a problem of changing conditions in which that identity-making takes place.

In this article I address the following question: how has the CBF Queen Pageant become a performance of Japanese American identity over the years.
in Honolulu with its shifting confluence of races, ethnicities, and politics—a "mixed plate" as locals call it. As a cultural performance, the CBF must be analyzed in part by the various audiences to which the pageant and its queen must perform. I focus on the many audiences (or more specifically, the perception of an audience by those in charge of the performance) and their shifting nature, asking who the audiences are, what they want, and for what purposes. In effect, we carry our audiences around within ourselves, if even as part of what some critics would call internal colonization (cf. Fanon 1952/1967). This is not to say that identities are false, only that they are part of our inherently social—and in this case, public—nature (Goffman 1959).

My point is that Japanese American identity is not a static concept. Rather, it shifts with the times. More specifically, it shifts with the changing audiences who view Japanese Americans; therefore it is the audiences themselves who help to construct that identity. The CBF is one public stage of Japanese American identity, and when the curtain goes up every spring since 1953 when it began, one can see not only the performers but also the stage itself and the audiences to which it plays. These shifts at times emphasize an American side, at other times a Japanese side (even as these both change with the times), and sometimes a particular mix of the two within the context of Hawai‘i. I base my analysis on 30 interviews with past participants (queens, organizers, and others), examination of all 50 of the festival’s program books, and participant observation I conducted in the preparation and execution of the fiftieth anniversary CBF in 2001–2002.

**Placing the Cherry Blossom Festival within its Historical and Organizational Contexts**

In order to better understand these shifts in the CBF, it is useful to place its beginnings within an historical and organizational context. The CBF is the premier activity of the Honolulu Japanese Junior Chamber of Commerce (HJJCC), which was started in 1949. According to the 1991 CBF pageant booklet, the "main objective [of the organization was]: to provide other JA Japanese Americans with an opportunity to help resolve the prejudices bred by the war [World War II], as well as develop programs for self improvement, civic involvement, and development of leadership qualities" (1991:16). Ethnic separatism—part of the legacy of plantation policy—was once again invoked as a *modus operandus* of the Japanese American community. This ethnically separate organization was thus supposed to develop practices of community leadership parallel with that of mainstream processes in Hawai‘i in order to address the challenges of anti-Japanese racial tensions in the post-World War II period.

The organization began with 45 charter members, mostly from the field of business. As a Nisei (second generation Japanese American) organization, the HJJCC found itself caught in a bind created by differences between ethnic communities, as well as within the Japanese one. Part of the reason for its founding was that younger Japanese Americans did not think that their voices carried sufficient weight in general local circles, thus leading to an ethnically separate organization. The HJJCC (1985:66) put it this way:

[AFTER WORLD WAR II], a handful of Nisei were members of the Honolulu Junior Chamber of Commerce, the oldest and perhaps the most prestigious young men’s organization in Honolulu at that time. The majority of the membership was overwhelmingly young Caucasian men employed by larger companies in supervisory capacities or else young independent professionals. Many of the young Nisei at that time felt they were not yet ready for nor welcome into that group.

Nisei, then, were both intimidated and felt shunned by larger power structures then prevailing in Hawai‘i. Furthermore, according to Peter Fukunaga, then president of the senior Honolulu Japanese Chamber of Commerce, “the Nisei, by nature, were not aggressive enough to compete with the other young [Caucasian] men of the community” (ibid.). This perception was later refuted in the 1954 Democratic “revolution” during which war veteran Nisei such as Daniel Inouye and spark Matsunaga were elected to public office.

Another part of the impetus for this new organization, however, also lay in the generational difficulties among Japanese Americans: the senior organization—the Honolulu Japanese Chamber of Commerce—was run by Issei who spoke little English and did not allow junior Nisei much voice in the organization. As the HJJCC put it, “Few Nisei felt comfortable with the Japanese Chamber [of Commerce] because of a problem of fluency in the [Japanese] language, or for the mere fact that the younger men had not yet established themselves in the business world” (ibid.). Doubly shut out, these Nisei felt they had little choice other than to form their own related-but-separate organization. This characterization, however, is not entirely correct. In fact, it was at the instigation of not Nisei but the president of the primarily Issei senior organization, Fukunaga, that the HJJCC was founded. Fukunaga, recognizing the dilemma faced by the Nisei, “concluded that there was a need for a young Nisei organization in which these young men might feel at home.
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Although begun as an ethnically exclusive male organization, the HJJCC has since broadened its membership base. Significantly, it did this first on the basis of race and then on the basis of gender. The opening of its membership to persons of other ethnicities took place in the late 1950s, after considerable local criticism concerning its exclusivity. The opening of its membership to women finally took place in 1984 when the national organization (US Jaycees) voted unanimously to allow women equal participating membership in the national Jaycee organization as a result of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.4 HJJCC lists its milestones as follows: first Filipino American president (1969), first Caucasian president (1975), first Chinese American president (1979), first female president (1990, a Chinese American), and first female general chair of the CBF (1992).

What is interesting is the contrast between how long it took the organization to open itself to non-Japanese members (late 1950s, leading to non-Japanese presidents) as opposed to not fully Japanese beauty queens (change in blood-quantum ruling in 1998). Within the less public face of the organization, there was greater flexibility far earlier than in the very public face of that organization’s beauty queen. Gender plays a significant part here as well. It is not so much that the organization’s president was a private figure. He was indeed a public figure, but one who did not attract the degree of attention of a beauty queen. She—not the HJJCC president—is the one who stands alongside mayors and governors at public functions that range from opening of shopping centers to meeting international dignitaries. She may not be a head of state but, like the royalty she emulates, she presides by image alone. The importance of preserving that image, therefore, becomes part of the work of the community and its institutions. The contrast with the HJJCC president highlights the importance placed upon the CBF Queen as a very public female figure of display, representing the HJJCC and Japanese Americans in general to the various audiences I discuss. She becomes part of the mirror invested with burdens of identity and power for and of the Japanese American community. Until 1999, the only figure considered suitable to shoulder that burden was a woman of 100 percent Japanese blood.

Note that here we are only talking about genotype, not phenotype. Even among full-blooded Japanese there is obviously a range of physical appearances, from the short to the tall, the fair- to the dark-skinned, the round- to the long-faced, the long-torsoed to the long-legged. Therefore, a ruling on blood quantum does not necessarily guarantee a CBF Queen who “looks Japanese”
or even agreement on what constitutes that look. In fact, according to several queens I interviewed, many controversies arose in the years prior to 1999 over contestants and queens whose full-bloodedness was questioned based upon various phenotypic ambiguities, such as a high-bridged nose or particularly angular features. In all these controversies, the suspicion raised was that the queen might be half-Caucasian.

**Ethnic Beauty Contest Contexts**

The context in which the CBF takes place includes that of its U.S. continent counterpart and inspiration, the Nisei Week Beauty Contest in Los Angeles, as well as other ethnic beauty contests in Hawai’i. It also includes other Nikkei (persons of Japanese ancestry) beauty contests in San Francisco and Seattle with which the CBF has formal ties.

The Nisei Week Festival was started in the Little Tokyo area of Los Angeles in 1934 (with beauty contest added in 1935) to generate business and job opportunities there. By creating a festival that included cultural exhibits and demonstrations, organizers hoped to draw not only Japanese Americans but also the wider public to the area. Unfortunately, World War II intervened, and the festival was stopped in 1941. Resuming four years after the war’s end in 1949, the festival in the 2000s includes cultural exhibits and demonstrations, martial arts demonstrations, sports tournaments, arts and crafts, fair, carnival, fashion show, five-kilometer run, street ondo (bon dance), taiko festival, car show, karaoke festival, and a beauty contest. Nisei Week has been a site of ongoing inner conflict over what it means to be Japanese American, with divides between generations, social classes, and those who wish to emphasize either Japanese or American elements (Kurashige 2002). Although the festival is still going strong, the number of contestants has dropped considerably since its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s. The CBF has had a formal relationship with Los Angeles’ Nisei Week Festival since 1971.

The other two Nikkei beauty contests that the CBF has formal relationships with are the Greater Seattle Japanese Community Queen pageant, established in 1961, and the Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival in San Francisco’s Japan town, established in 1967. Both of these contests have far fewer contestants than that in Hawai’i or Los Angeles. In fact, in some years Seattle does not select a queen for lack of candidates. The Northern California festival was founded amidst the late 1960s period of political turmoil, resulting in politicized ethnic pride. That a beauty contest should symbolize this pride indicates the distance between feminism and ethnic politics.

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These other Nikkei beauty contests have received their share of criticism. In 1985 the Women’s Concerns Committee of the Tri-District (Northern California, Western Nevada, Pacific) Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) passed a resolution opposing JACL sponsorship of Nikkei beauty contests. Their resolution states in part:

- Whereas, in the past, some JACL chapters have sponsored candidates for beauty contests, and;
- Whereas, beauty contests, by their very nature, promote the notion of physical attributes as being a woman’s most desirable feature, and;
- Whereas, this definition of beauty is based more on values derived from Anglo-European physical characteristics than from Asian physical characteristics, therefore, by inference, denigrating Asian physical characteristics, and;
- Whereas, JACL is dedicated to promoting the ideals of fairness, equality and the dignity of all human beings,

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Tri-District Conference recommends to the National JACL Board that JACL chapters be encouraged to cease the practice of sponsoring candidates for beauty contests (The Hawaii Herald 1985:1).

What remains unclear is whether the JACL opposed beauty contests in general, Anglo-European ideals of beauty, or beauty contests as institutional upholders of Anglo-European ideal of beauty. If one could impose, for example, Asian ideals of beauty, would that make beauty contests any more palatable?

Another notable context in which the CBF must be viewed is that of ethnic beauty contests in Hawai’i such as that held by Chinese, Koreans, and Filipinos. Of these, the Chinese-based Narcissus Festival Queen Pageant established in 1949 is important both as a forerunner of the CBF in the local community as well as the second major ethnic beauty contest currently held in Honolulu. In Hawai’i the two festivals and queens often go hand in hand—one queen appearing at the other queen’s events, and both queens standing side by side representing their communities at statewide events. Both contests include similar features: cooking show, fashion show, public appearances by contestants, and cultural demonstrations. And both are terminal contests, that is, they are sufficient unto themselves and do not necessarily lead to larger interlinked contests.

Other ethnic beauty pageants contributing to the historical context of the CBF are multiethnic beauty contests held at McKinley High School and
the University of Hawai'i. The University of Hawai'i conducted its annual multiethnic Ka Palapala contest from 1941 to 1971, crowning queens in the following categories: Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Caucasian, Cosmopolitan, and later Filipino, and sometimes Hawaiian. These racial/ethnic categories did not require candidates to be pure-blooded; therefore, for example, in 1954, twin sisters competed in two different categories, Hawaiian and Japanese (Silverman 1955:22). The contest tended to emphasize both the differences among the racial/ethnic groups through such events as parading in ethnic costume as well as their similarities as Americans. The 1945–46 Ka Palapala yearbook attributes racial/ethnic and personal qualities to each of the queens; for example, a head shot of the Japanese queen, Harriet Serai, includes the following caption (with original ellipses): "Japanese... lovely... unassuming... her wistful eyes belie her amiable disposition... a disarming personality..." (Ka Palapala 1945–46:216).

The primarily ethnic sororities at the time played no small part in the operations of the contest. According to queens I interviewed, during the 1960s, Wakabakai, known as the "Japanese sorority," yearly selected one female to run for the Japanese segment of the Ka Palapala contest and one to run for Cherry Blossom Queen from among its members. Other sorority members helped train these candidates for the competitions. Many of the sorority-picked candidates successfully won their respective crowns.

Although there was no explicit divide-and-control power issue as there was in plantation separatism, these multiethnic contests placed symbolically equal queens on stage competing within internal groupings. These contests displayed ethnicity as a mythic rainbow of colors, spectacularized amidst the all-American idiom of a beauty contest. The CBF, then, dwells within these various contexts, each of which provides a particular set of expectations from among its audiences.

**Cherry Blossom Festival and its Audiences**

From its inception in 1953, the audience for the CBF has included the general public in Hawai'i. With early features such as fireworks displays at Honolulu Stadium, motorcades through downtown, and lantern parades of kimono-clad queens and candidates riding rickshaws, one can see the degree to which the festival was a colorful public spectacle and a major annual event in the local calendar. The festival and its queen during the 1950s and 1960s made headlines in the daily English-language newspapers.

The audience for the CBF has also been the Japanese American community in Hawai'i. When you consider the early 1950s, less than ten years after the end of World War II and its accompanying racial tensions, then it makes sense that the first few CBFs emphasized the American-ness of the event and its organizers. The decision to call this officially the Cherry Blossom Festival, rather than Sakura Matsuri (Japanese equivalent), was more than a simple linguistic choice. Rather, the name "Cherry Blossom Festival" negotiated the still-sensitive terrain of East and West, of Japan and America, through the politically safe space of nature, aesthetics, and cultural celebration. The first festival directory talked about the HJCC as promoting an "American Way of Life," forwarding "the ideals of Americanism." The 1953 fireworks display ended with the American flag depicted in brilliant flashes upon the night sky. These and other aspects of early festivals demonstrate the degree to which Japanese American in the early 1950s was a performance of American-ness first, and Japanese-ness second.

The Japanese American audience is not homogeneous. In fact, it has always been made up of factions and competing subgroups. One particularly significant subgroup is that of Okinawans. The prejudice and discrimination suffered by Okinawans at the hands of other Japanese Americans (also known as Naichi, those from the "main islands" of Japan) is well known. The HJCC never made it a policy to exclude Okinawan contestants from competing in the CBF Queen Pageant, but it was not until 1967 that a woman of Okinawan ancestry, Gwendolyn Nishizawa, was crowned the 15th CBF Queen.

A third important audience for the CBF has been the business community. Although seen as a cultural activity today, the CBF had its beginnings in business and its leaders. In fact, since the 1950s, male civic groups such as the Jaycees, Elks, Rotary and other organizations have been the main sponsors of America’s beauty contests (Cohen et al. 1996:5). Given the male dominance of the business community in the early 1950s and to a certain extent afterward, beauty contests have been a production of men in their selection of a female queen as a representative. In fact, as I suggested earlier, beauty contests such as the CBF become a story of the men these queens represent, even more than the queens themselves. A look at especially the early souvenir books of the CBF attests to this. The 1956 souvenir book includes individual portraits of the male steering committee, as well as informal shots of the men at work. Photos express the gender divide well, depicting men in both physical and mental labor with captions such as, "Many a smoke and conversation-filled session..."
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The audience also includes tourists to Hawai‘i, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, although much less so in the 1990s and 2000s. In the very first directory of the CBF, then President of the HJCC Theodore Tomita talked about establishing “another major attraction to bring tourists to Hawai‘i from the mainland and elsewhere” (HJCC 1953:3). By 1954, the festival had become second only to Aloha Week as a tourist attraction. In the festival booklets of the 1950s to 1970s, letters from the mayor of Honolulu and governor of Hawai‘i invariably mention the CBF’s contribution to the community through the promotion of tourism. The CBF became one more of Hawai‘i’s many multicultural public events, contributing to the state’s exotic image.12

One of the CBF’s biggest supporters, in fact, has been a tourist: Mr. Lennie Lekovitz, a retired grain farmer from Saskatchewan, Canada. Lekovitz first came to Hawai‘i in 1960 along with his wife Dollie and his mother. At that time, he found out about the CBF through the tourist publication Waikiki Press and attended a CBF public appearance. Since then until 1986 (for 26 years), he came yearly to Hawai‘i not only to attend but also to help out with the festival as his own idiosyncratic adopted pet project. Each year he purchased souvenir booklets with his own money and gave them away; he put up festival posters, he drove around contestants and the queen and her court. At Lili‘ha Bakery in Honolulu, where he and his wife were regular customers, he became known as “Mr. Cherry Blossom.” His story was memorialized in the 1991 festival booklet (Saito 1991:51). Stories of tourists such as Lekovitz are unusual, but they give the festival a sense of its own lore, impacting the lives of those well outside the local community.

The audience for the CBF includes Japan, especially its mayors, business organizations, and sponsors of the festival. In the 1950s when much of Japan was swept up in a mania for things American, the idea of an American beauty queen coming to their soil generated a lot of interest, all the more so because the American was of Japanese ancestry. Anna Tokumaru-Bain (2001),13 the second Cherry Blossom Queen, recalls:

From what I understand, one of the reasons why I was selected [as Cherry Blossom Queen] was that the people that sponsored it in Japan... wanted to have a Cherry Blossom Queen that looked more like a Hawai‘i-type Japanese, rather than a Japanese [looking] Japanese. So I fit the bill... [I was] five-five [5’-5’’]... [and] I wasn’t flat-chested.
In other words, Japanese sponsors of the CBF wanted a Japanese American queen to be distinct from a Japanese queen. She should have what they perceived to be an American body: tall, long-legged, and busty. Anna’s face also looked more Eurasian than most with its sharp, angular features. When she went to Japan, she was offered a movie contract by Shochiku Productions, a major Japanese studio, which she declined. Subsequently, she went into a career of modeling in the United States and Europe, building upon her Eurasian looks. Audiences in Japan in the 1950s, in their own process of rebuilding after World War II amidst the American Occupation, were enamored with things American. They looked to a Nikkei beauty queen from America as one possible blend of their blood born and raised on American soil.

The presence of a Japanese audience continues to shape the CBF. In the 2000s, Japanese companies play a major role in festival sponsorship. All but one Diamond Sponsor (top level of sponsorship) are Japanese companies: Central Pacific Bank, Japan Airlines, Fujiyasu Kimono Company, Shiseido, Kyoya Company, Ltd., Japan Travel Bureau, Watabe Wedding Corporation, Nissan Motors, and Obun Hawai‘i, Inc. (The one non-Japanese Diamond Sponsor is Hilton Hawaiian Village.) In part because of these long-standing business connections, the CBF Queen and her entourage of chaperones, family members, and/or HJCC members have the opportunity to meet at least one member of Japan’s royal family as schedules permit during the annual two-week tour of Japan that is part of the queen’s prize. In fact, many queens I interviewed speak about this royal visit as the highlight of not only their trip to Japan but of their entire year’s reign.

During informal discussions, organizers and judges express concern over the queen and her court interacting properly with Japanese sponsors. According to them, part of the job of the queen and court is to express gratitude to Japanese sponsors; therefore they must act respectfully following prescribed etiquette. A certain allowance is made for the queen and her court because, for the most part, they did not grow up in Japan. They are acknowledged, then, as ignorant foreigners. Yet, as representatives, they must negotiate this terrain carefully: many in Japan still insist that Japanese Americans are but prodigal children of their “homeland” Japan. Furthermore, Japanese sponsors expect a certain level of knowledge about Japanese customs and behavior from a CBF Queen and court. For example, 47th CBF Queen Lori Murayama (2002) recalls her lesson on pouring drinks:

If you see someone’s glass almost empty, you’re supposed to pour the beer to fill it up. They [those preparing her for her trip to Japan] were saying, “Yeah, you should try to do that.” And I was like, “What is that?!” I was totally against it. But then going there [to Japan], I realized it was not too much a male-female kind of thing. It was just more being hospitable to each other. Because I noticed it wasn’t just women pouring beer for men. It was like men were pouring for each other, too. It was more of a gesture, a nice gesture.

By the early 1960s, the tone of the festivals had changed from its earlier emphasis on American-ness. Taking the lead, perhaps from Japanese American middle class Nisei political leaders of the late 1950s and 1960s who were less concerned with proving their American-ness, the HJCC shifted its own sense of public display. On the cover of the 1961 booklet, Queen Shirley Fujisaki appeared in kimono, a switch from the previous six covers whose queens had appeared in Western gown, cape, scepter, and crown. The switch from gowns to kimonos may have been a small decision at the time, but it was not completely by accident, and suggests a greater degree of willingness to place a Japanese cultural component of identity up front, in public, and on center stage. Japan by this time was emerging from defeat in World War II through sheer human effort, ascending to international economic prominence and gaining its own cultural confidence. Although “made in Japan” may have still been a common moniker in the United States suggesting stereotypically cheap imitation goods, what it also implied was the rise of Japanese industrial activity. Within Japan by the end of the 1960s was a sense of catching up to other countries and of asserting its own cultural nationalism. In the CBF booklets, the crown appears only sporadically on covers through the 1960s but reappears in 1970 and stays fairly consistently on booklet covers to this day. The matter of kimonos and crowns sounds trivial, and in some cases the decision could have been made on the whim of a photographer or hairdresser. But my contention is that these small matters become part of larger cultural processes of the performance of selves.

The covers of the CBF souvenir booklets show little evidence of the political turmoil of the late 1960s and 1970s in America. Part of the irony lies in looking at the CBF in an American context. In the midst of feminist protests against beauty contests, these Japanese American queens look provincially conservative. This holds true even as the generational switchover was taking place from more conservative Nisei to more liberal Sansei. In spite of the rise of Sansei to positions of leadership as organization president and queen, the CBF, especially with close ties to business, remained a bastion of conservatism. While American women were railing against male-centered standards of beauty and feminism, these Japanese American women were presenting an
idealized Asian-based femininity. And yet, behind the smiling faces lie occasional stories of rebels turned queens.

One such rebel was Sansei Kathy Horio Grebe, 18th Cherry Blossom Queen reigning from 1970–1971. Grebe (2001) recalls her rebellious days as a high school dropout:

I was the real rebel. . . . I just ceased to care from the eighth grade on. I started surfing. I got real interested in Polynesian things and basically lived in Waikiki and was very un-Japanese. Very un-Japanese. My father said, "You can dance and go to school," [to which I replied], "Nope." So I just moved out of the house, moved into Waikiki, became a professional Tahitian dancer.

Horio Grebe’s turn toward things Japanese occurred over the course of a tour taken by the Polynesian dance revue in which she was performing.

So I danced. I was happily living in Waikiki. Then I got a job touring in Japan for an entire summer. . . . That turned me around, in terms of realizing the [Japanese] culture and the heritage that I had. Being in Japan and seeing, being exposed to the culture for three solid months. It was such a wonderful experience. I came back [to Hawai’i] and decided I needed to finish high school and go to college. So I got my diploma through the GED. And then I started attending UH and then I decided, I think it would be a real good way to explore my Japanese heritage by participating in the Cherry Blossom Festival (ibid.).

She won the contest and continues to be one of its most active and ardent supporters. Her rebel-turned-beauty-queen story comes directly out of the turbulence of the late 1960s and 1970s, while negating some of that period’s more political aspects such as feminism and anti-war protests.

As the urbanity of life and the number of competing events in Honolulu increased, the centrality of the CBF for the general public waned. The rapidly growing tourist industry provided other kinds of diversions, and festival organizers in the later 1970s talked little of the festival as a major tourist attraction as they had in the past. Japanese American identity in some sense became less public because the public paid less attention. At the same time, Japan’s economic ascendency created some distancing between Japanese Americans in Hawai’i and Japanese nationals. Japanese Americans joined other locals in the anti-Japanese backlash against the rapid acquisition of major expensive property in Hawai’i from hotels to homes, driving real estate prices skyward beyond the reach of many residents.

The 1990s and Beyond

Let us fast forward to the decade of the 1990s. The social tumult of the 1960s and 1970s has been incorporated into the structures of the festival and its organization. Gender roles have changed. Women were allowed as members of the HJJCC, as I mentioned earlier, in 1984, and in 1992, Lenny Yajima Andrew, well-traveled Harvard graduate and the 34th CBF Queen in 1986, became the first female chair of the festival. In 1999, beauty was eliminated as a criterion in judging candidates for queen.

Concepts of Japanese American ethnicity also underwent changes. Increasingly during the 1980s and 1990s, contestants’ preparatory classes prior to the festival included not only the make-up and modeling classes that had hitherto been part of beauty pageant training, but also cultural classes in tea ceremony, flower arranging, Japanese business etiquette, and more recently taiko drumming and even manju (Japanese confection) making. These classes and other preparations last a full six months, beginning as early as October and lasting up to the week of the pageant in late March. The time and personal commitment on the part of contestants, teachers, and organizers, therefore, is considerable. Furthermore, the classes do not cost contestants anything; rather, they are required to participate in them and attendance is taken at each class. Through classes such as these, pageant organizers make explicit their production of culture, identity, and meaning. For the primarily fourth generation Yonsei who now make up the contestants, these become lessons in being Japanese (perhaps more than being Japanese American). For most, it is their first time participating in any of these cultural activities. In contrast to the organizers and participants of the first festivals who spent much of their time and energy proving their American-ness, those of these later festivals take their American identities for granted. Japan for them is the remote, foreign country whose words they do not understand and some of whose ways they try to learn. Most former queens and contestants I spoke with mention the CBF as one means by which they could learn more about their own heritage as ethnic Japanese. One contestant in the 49th CBF Queen Pageant, Sydnee Yamauchi (2001), explained:

I think being Japanese American is very difficult for girls nowadays. . . . We have to come together as one in America and kind of deal with, "Okay, this is American way, this is Japanese way." I guess for us, being Japanese American or American Japanese means to incorporate [Japanese] culture into our American ways.
For her, “American ways” is the ground upon which she learns and adds “Japanese culture.”

In fact, since some of the organizers are not ethnic Japanese, Japan is not only remote but may be fairly inconsequential. For many non-Japanese organizers, the CBF is simply a large-scale project that happens to have Japan as part of its focus. As one second-generation Filipino American organizer, Leo Asuncion (2002), put it:

[CBF] was more for me about the business organizational part, like how to run it better, how to run programs better, what new things can we do… So [it could be] whatever activity that the organization [HJJCC] was doing at the time… I don’t really see the focus of the whole thing as an ethnic thing… For me, it’s a big project and it’s a public project.

Asuncion expresses what is made explicit in souvenir books from many of the earliest to the latest ones: one of the primary purposes of the CBF for members of the HJJCC is “to give training in leadership to the young men [and later, women] of Honolulu” (HJJCC 1954:3). For both Japanese Americans and non-Japanese Americans interested primarily in business, leadership, and organization, HJJCC’s production of culture through the CBF is a job, not unlike that of an advertising agency, albeit on a volunteer basis.

In 1998, the HJJCC—not without controversy—overturned a decades-old rule by allowing women with less than 100 percent Japanese blood to run for queen. In fact, as leaders responsible for the change were quick to point out, Hawaii’s CBF was the last of the Japanese American beauty contests to change this rule. The change reflects not only the increased rate of intermarriage among all ethnic groups in Hawai‘i, but also a significant move away from defining Japanese American identity on the basis of blood. Without the mooring of blood, however, the question of entitlement—who gets to represent an ethnic community—becomes even more difficult to pin down. In some ways, it has gone hand in hand with the externalization and teaching of Japanese cultural activities as part of the festival candidates’ training. This externalization, however, can cause a stir, especially among older generations more familiar with assuming their organization’s leaders and queens to be named Saikyo or Honda rather than Asuncion or Toth.

Since 1999, with mixed-race contestants and queens, some of the same issues that plagued the CBF can be inescapable on the stage. For example, the degree to which a candidate should “look Japanese”—the phenotypic issue discussed earlier—well predated the inclusion of mixed-blood contestants.

More than one fully Japanese queen whom I interviewed talked about questions raised about their ethnicity. One queen was criticized because her nose was too tall, another because her eyes were too large, another because she simply did not have a Japanese “look.” A kimono instructor whom I interviewed said that a kimono and a non-Japanese face may look like an odd mix to Japanese (Sakai 2002). This may be acceptable in Hawai‘i, but when the queen and her court go to Japan, they may face criticism there if, as the kimono instructor points out, the face and the clothes do not match. The matching issue in the past was moot since all queens were certified as genotypically of Japanese blood, as in the example of the second CBF Queen Anna Tokumaru. Therefore, if a genotypically Japanese queen had an attractive but phenotypically non-Japanese look (especially if she tended to look half-Caucasian), then this could be seen as a plus in her favor. However, when the genotype is mixed, then straying too far from a Japanese phenotype may be regarded as detrimental. In this way, the boundaries of race as phenotypically expressed may be policed more carefully when the genotype is mixed.

Race may also be inscribed onto the issue of acting Japanese or knowing Japanese culture. According to a woman who has been actively involved with the contest from its inception, what she enjoys seeing is the transformation of the contestants from the initial raw material to the polish and poise of the women on stage. She refers to make-up and modeling movements, of course. But she also refers to the ways in which contestants have been “Japan-ized,” that is, taught the presentation of Japanese virtues of modesty and self-effacement. She alludes to these issues by describing bodily changes—how the women initially may laugh with their mouths wide open and sit with their legs apart—but how after training, they know how to control these bodily movements into graceful performances of Japanese femininity. Furthermore, she covertly suggests that these performances may more easily be enacted by those who are fully Japanese—or rather, that those of mixed blood or culture (especially if that mixing includes non-Asian blood or culture) may find the transition more difficult. One Caucasian father of a contestant confided to me that he and his (Japanese American) wife were amazed at the transformation in their daughter over the course of the pageant training. According to him, she has become more respectful and appreciative of her parents’ efforts, to which he credits the pageant’s teaching of Japanese cultural values.

Whereas formerly, these kinds of issues and changes might have been talked about at a personal level, they can now be essentialized as problems of
blood and culture. In other words, the variations that existed within a race-based community (Japanese American), are now being discussed as between communities (Japanese American and non-Japanese American), as following blood-cultural lines and mixings. Variations of phenotypic looks, bodily comportment, and values have become suspect as racially bound, blaming intermarriage as the cause of an expanded range of possibilities, even if these possibilities pre-existed within the Japanese American community.

Conclusion

In 2002, the HJJCC stands at a critical juncture, trying once again to define Japanese American-ness. No longer tied fully to blood, Japanese American identity has been externalized as cultural practice. But these practices that themselves keep changing. The manju that the contestants learn to make is not what is found in Japan but is “jack-o-lantern manju”— an orange bun in which has been cut out the eyes, nose, and mouth of a smiling jack-o-lantern colored brown from the azuki bean filling.17 The taiko that the contestants learn comes through the filter of drumming as an evolving syncretic symbol of Japanese American cultural practice by way of California and Japan. Even in Japan, taiko ensembles are a newly evolved and invented twentieth-century tradition. With rhythms, physicality, and visual display appealing to a wide range of people (including youth), taiko is taught to CBF contestants by Kenny Endo, a transplanted California Sansei who has galvanized the popularity of drumming in Hawai’i.

Furthermore, the changes in Japanese American identity come alongside changes in Japan. Many young people in Japan are often as unfamiliar with tea ceremony, flower-arranging, and kimonos-dressing as are the Japanese American queen contestants. Cultural practices aside, many of an older generation in Japan decry the morals and values of Japanese youth. As one kimon instructor from Japan put it, “Parents [in Japan] spoil their children nowadays…. Japan today is bad…. I’ve lived in Hawai’i all these years [since 1969], and when I see what’s happened to Japan, I’m shocked” (Sakai 2002). What she is referring to is what many older people in Japan perceive as a laxity in behavior, a lack of training in etiquette, traditional arts, and spiritual values among youth. In her opinion, young people in Japan could benefit by some of the same training given the Japanese American CBF contestants. Japan, too, has been evolving in its own ways, alongside changes in Hawai’i, the United States, and the rest of the world. In other words, neither Japanese nor American aspects of Japanese American identity and culture have remained static.

Japanese American identity displayed in the CBF has also become complicated by the acceptance of mixed-race contestants and queens. At least one of the contestants has also participated in the Chinese American Narcissus contest. Can a person in one year be the perfect representative of Chinese American identity and in the following year transform herself into a representative of Japanese American identity? The answer apparently is yes, if those identities are understood as performances rather than birthrights or assumptions of blood. And yet these are performances still keyed in some measure to blood. The CBF, like other ethnic beauty pageants, requires at least 50 percent Japanese blood. In other words, the performance of ethnic identity is not completely race-blind, only partly so. But how much is enough? As intermarriage increases, will the 50 percent quantum be reduced further? As blood declines in relevance, what meaning does the CBF or other ethnic beauty pageants have? If culture is the answer, then how malleable can culture be before it no longer carries meaning? These questions suggest some of the complexity of the issues regarding identity that surround ethnic pageants in Hawai’i in the twenty-first century.

As the sense of “local” increasingly supersedes that of “Japanese American,” I suggest that an event such as the CBF becomes a forum for debating and defining one segment of “local” identity before an audience of locals and outsiders (see Okamura 1980, 1994). An influx of tourists, immigrants, and cultures—in other words, globalization—has helped draw the lines between local and non-local with greater relevance, some might say, than between various ethnic groups. This is not to say that the differences between ethnic groups in Hawai’i have no meaning, only that with each passing generation, locals pay less and less attention to dividing cultural practices.18 The fact that in this 50th anniversary year of the CBF neither English-language paper in Honolulu chose to carry the story of the queen’s crowning at any length suggests that the competition of the CBF lies not only between the women on stage, but also between the HJJCC and other events, organizations, and communities. The CBF competes, above all, for a primarily Japanese American audience that has itself become unfocused, scattered, and distracted by other concerns and obligations. While attention paid to beauty contests in general have been on the wane in the United States since the feminist movement of the 1970s, the CBF example suggests the problems inherent when the chosen representative flounders for attention before a community which stands in perilous flux. That flux rests in conditions of changing generations, values, orientations, expectations, and cohesiveness.
I argue that the CBF stands in danger of becoming an archaic institution—all dressed up and nowhere to go—in part because of the decreasing salience of “Japanese American” as a separate and separable segment of a larger community in Hawai‘i. It is not as if ethnic groups such as Japanese Americans have disappeared, but they no longer occupy the central position they once held, and organizations and events based in Japanese American ethnicity, such as kenjinkai (organizations based on prefecture of origin in Japan), the United Japanese Society (an umbrella organization of Japanese American associations), Buddhist temples, and the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai‘i, which in 2002 faces a financial crisis threatening its very existence, have been hard put to retain an active membership, especially among youth. As the boundaries of exclusiveness fall by the wayside through intermarriage and participation in a broader society, a sense of community centered around some form of Japanese American identity wanes. Questions abound. What meaning does “Japanese American” have in an organization whose members—even leaders—include not only Japanese but also Filipinos, Chinese, Caucasians, and mixtures thereof? What meaning does “Japanese American” have in a larger community that looks increasingly to the umbrella identity of local rather than to racial/ethnic categories? It is exactly in recognition of this larger context that organizers scrambled to institute changes in the CBF in 1998 and continue to do so in the 2000s. The ambivalent position of the CBF vis-à-vis Hawai‘i’s broader community shows the complexity of the evolving local scene, challenging the primacy of race and ethnicity in the mixed plate of contemporary life.

Notes

1. “Beauty contest” also becomes a pejorative for other kinds of competition as well. For example, I once heard a judge at a dog show explain the seriousness of the judging and competition by indicating that the dog show was “not a beauty contest.”

2. The blood quantum rule change was made in 1998. Therefore, the first competition that included mixed-blood contestants was planned in 1998–99 and held in 1999.

3. “Mixed plate” refers to a menu choice at local eateries, especially vans known as “lunch wagons,” that typically serve rice (ordered by the number of scoops), macaroni salad, condiment (Japanese pickles known as takuwan or Korean spicy pickles known as kim chee), and a meat-based main course (e.g., shoyu chicken, hamburger steak, beef stew, kalua pig and cabbage). Ordering a mixed plate means that you get a combination of main courses from the daily offering. The term “mixed plate” is also used symbolically in Hawai‘i to refer to the mixing of race and ethnicity that is a part of the local scene.

4. Many of its current female members and CBF organizers are themselves either former CBF queens, court members, or contestants. Since the 1990s, the HIJCJC has made it a point to encourage those who have run in the CBF Queen Pageant to become subsequently HIJCJC members.

5. By contrast, the Miss Chinatown Hawaii pageant leads to the Miss Chinatown USA contest, and the Miss Korea Hawaii contest leads to the Miss Korea International contest held yearly in Seoul. Although several CBF Queens have gone on to compete in the Miss Nikkei International contest held in Brazil, they have not done so as CBF Queens. In other words, holding the title of CBF Queen did not structurally lead into the larger international competition. Rather, they (and other non-CBF Queen Japanese American women) were handpicked by a staff member at the Hawaii Hochi, a Japanese-language newspaper in Hawai‘i, who acted as the local contact, to participate in the international contest. Representation from Hawai‘i at the Miss Nikkei International contest has been sporadic.

6. From 1938 on, multiethnic beauty contests were held at the University of Hawai‘i sponsored by the school newspaper Ka Leo and the school yearbook Ka Palapala. However, the official Ka Palapala contest did not begin until 1941. The crowning of Ka Palapala queens was sporadic through the war years. The yearbook lists queens for 1942 but not for 1943 or 1944. The 1945–46 combined Ka Palapala yearbook (1945–46:211) features a multi-page article on the Ka Palapala queens:

Supported by enthusiastic veterans who returned to the campus during the second semester, the annual Ka Palapala beauty contest, held for the first time since the outbreak of war, turned out to be one of the biggest events of the year. In the course of the four weeks of the contest, interest overflowed into the community where the campus beauties became a popular topic of conversation. Fifty-five candidates were presented dramatically to the student body and faculty first at a personality quiz program in Hemenway. A rousing bathing beauty rally followed at the swimming pool. Finally, a third rally featured the contestants as hostesses at an informal dance. Cameramen—professional and amateur—disregarding film shortages, squandered all their precious stocks at these rallies.

7. These categories were not consistent through the years of the contest. In 1938 the categories were in order of their listing: Caucasian, Caucasian-Hawaiian, Asiatic-Hawaiian, Chinese, Korean, and Cosmopolitan (Ka Leo o Hawai‘i 1938:1). The next year, 1939, when listing the winners of the contest, the school newspaper does not list a Cosmopolitan winner but lists a Japanese winner (Ka Leo o Hawai‘i 1939:2). Although most of the contests list the categories as I have given in this text, other anomalies occurred over the years. For example, in the 1968 contest, the categories included “Negro” and “Hawaiian.”

8. One writer in 1955 claimed that the racial differences of the Ka Palapala queens were converging into an “American look” (Silverman 1955:22):

Looking back over the photographs of those earliest [Ka Palapala beauty contest] winners, it is easy to see why contest founders felt the contestants
of that period must be judged in several clearly defined categories. Differences between the so-called racial types were easily detected, then. Today things are somewhat different.

...What strikes an average observer is, when Americans of various ancestries act, talk and think as Americans, any physical characteristics that might indicate a particular background become inconsequential. They have “the American look.”

Silverman goes on to say that actually the women have not so much an “American look,” but a “Hawaii look,” based on the concept of aloha. As he puts it, “Aloha has a way of rubbing off on all of us” (ibid.23).

9. In the very first CBF contest in 1953, two (Frances Akamine and Katherine Shiroma) out of the 72 contestants were sponsored by the United Okinawan Association of Hawaii, and I assume they are of Okinawan ancestry. Of the other candidates in subsequent contests, I can only guess which are Okinawan from their surnames. Judging by surnames, there were at least a few Okinawan contestants in every year’s contest but not in proportion to their numbers in the general Japanese American population.

10. Gwendolyn’s mother (Okinawan) remarried a Naichi Japanese American after her biological father (Okinawan) passed away. Therefore, she does not have an Okinawan surname. As a result, many more recent HJCC organizers, only referring to last names, do not know that Nishizawa was the first Okinawan CBF Queen. When I asked who the first queen of Okinawan ancestry was, the most common answer I was given was Myrah Higa, the 24th CBF Queen in 1976, followed by her sister LeAnne Higa in 1979 as the 27th CBF Queen. In fact, one person pointed out that during the 1970s and 1980s, there was a pattern in judging, so that an Okinawan contestant won every two or three years, pointing to the Higa sisters’ victory in 1976, then in 1979, followed by Jody-Lee Ige in 1982 and Lisa Nakahodo in 1984. Whether this “pattern” is deliberate or coincidental is less relevant than the public’s perception that such fixed judging exists.

11. In 2002, the queen’s awards include executive class roundtrip ticket to Japan, hotel and travel arrangements in Japan, including special hosting in Kyoto, roundtrip ticket to and hotel accommodations in Los Angeles, and roundtrip ticket to San Francisco. The first princess’ awards include hosting in Kyoto (no mention of airfare to Japan, Los Angeles, or San Francisco). Miss Popularity awards include executive class roundtrip ticket to Japan, hotel and travel arrangements in Japan, including special hosting in Kyoto. In other words, Miss Popularity’s awards are second in cash value only to the queen.

12. Hawaii’s image as an exotic tourist destination rested primarily upon its image as a Pacific site with hula dancers, surfers/beachboys, and swaying palm trees—not as an Asian site. Nevertheless, multicultural (including Asian) Hawai‘i became part of its exoticism by the late 1950s and 1960s.

13. When quoting former queens, I call them by their present names, embedding their maiden names within (Anna Tokumaru-Bain has a hyphenated last name. When she won, she was Anna Tokumaru.) However, when I discuss a former queen, I use the name by which she won the contest (e.g., Shirley Fujisaki).

14. The exact designations of sponsorship have changed over the years. In 2002, the different levels of sponsorship are offered as a package. The Diamond level of sponsorship costs $8,000 or $10,000 in in-kind goods and services, or a combination of the two, for which a sponsor receives a full page color ad in the CBF souvenir book, a premium table (10 seats) at both the CBF Ball and Fashion Show, and appearances on demand at corporate events. Gold Sponsors must donate $6,000 or $7,500 in in-kind goods and services; Silver Sponsors cost $3,000 or $4,000 in in-kind goods and services (HJCC n.d.).

15. Contestants, even from the early years of the CBF, are required to document their Japanese ethnicity with a birth certificate.

16. In fact, there have been too few mixed-race contestants and queens thus far to draw conclusions as to the degree to which a candidate’s phenotype may stray from a “Japanese look.” For example, to my knowledge there have been no candidates with African American blood, so the phenotype has not been tested in the direction of darker skin, kinky hair, or other African features. Furthermore, although there are instances of half-Caucasian Japanese Americans with naturally blond hair and basically Caucasian features, none have yet been contestants in the CBF.

17. The manju was devised by 34th CBF Queen Lenny Yajima. For the past several years, Lenny and her mother, Mrs. Lilian Yajima, who has been active in the CBF since its inception, hold a class in jack-o-lantern manju-making in October for the contestants at the Yajima home as part of their cultural training.

18. Certain ethnic groups have been able to counter this trend. Notably, Okinawans established their own cultural center, the Hawaii Okinawa Center (Hawaii United Okinawa Association) in Mililani, O‘ahu in 1990 that continues to thrive in the 2000s. In 2002, a Filipino center, the Filipino Community Center, opened to wide acclaim in Waipahu, O‘ahu. Both these examples suggest that possibilities for vibrant ethnic organizations continue in Hawai‘i in the 2000s in spite of a competing local sense of identity.

References


Mixing the Plate: Performing Japanese American Identity

Baseball and Beauty Queens: The Political Context of Ethnic Boundary Making in the Japanese American Community in Hawai‘i

JONATHAN Y. OKAMURA

In 1996 a former University of Hawai‘i baseball player, who is a Haole (white) raised in the islands, requested permission to play in the Japanesely O‘ahu AJA (Americans of Japanese Ancestry) Senior Baseball League. The player, Bill Blanchette, indicated he wanted to play in the AJA League because it is the most competitive league for former college and professional players like himself. His request was denied by the league’s Board of Directors without any formal explanation given to Blanchette. The league president and others who supported the board’s unanimous decision against changing its rule to admit non-Japanese players later cited as their reason the “cultural tradition” of exclusively Japanese American baseball teams and leagues in Hawai‘i since the 1900s.

In 1998 the Board of Directors of the Honolulu Japanese Junior Chamber of Commerce (hereafter Jaycees) voted unanimously to reduce the blood quantum requirement of contestants in its annual Cherry Blossom Queen pageant from 100 percent Japanese to 50 percent. This rule change, which became effective in 1999, allowed women of part-Japanese descent to compete for the first time in the then 47-year history of the Cherry Blossom Festival. While noting that the rule change was “overdue,” then Jaycees president Keith Kamisugi provided the rationale for the change: “If we want to have a festival that reflects the Japanese American community, which is multiethnic, the queen and court should reflect that multiethnicity” (quoted in Battad 1998: A1).

My interest in these two cases is because they both are concerned with constructing the ethnic boundaries of the Japanese American community through formal descent-based rules governing participation in organized activities conducted in public arenas, although both the AJA League and the Jaycees are private, not-for-profit organizations. As such, both cases can be viewed in the larger social context of the status and relations of Japanese Americans in multiethnic Hawai‘i rather than as issues pertaining solely or primarily to the Japanese American community, such as defining who is or is not considered to be Japanese. The larger political significance of these two cases extends beyond that community since they generated considerable public interest and, in the case of the AJA baseball league, substantial criticism from non-Japanese.

For comparative purposes, I also will discuss the Rice v. Cayetano decision of the U.S. Supreme Court on February 23, 2000 (and its ongoing aftermath) that similarly involved a descent-based eligibility rule, in this case concerning Native Hawaiian rights. In response to a suit filed by Hawai‘i resident Harold “Freddy” Rice, the court decided in his favor that a Hawai‘i state law which gave only Native Hawaiians the right to vote in elections for trustees of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA, a state government agency) violated the Fifteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, and therefore non-Hawaiians also have the right to vote in OHA elections. Despite Native Hawaiians having an unique political status and rights as the indigenous people of Hawai‘i (rather than being an ethnic minority), in its decision the Supreme Court considered them to be a race and thus applied the Fifteenth Amendment that prohibits restrictions on voting based on race. While Japanese Americans (along with other settler groups in Hawai‘i) and Native Hawaiians differ substantially in historical experiences and contemporary political and economic status insofar as the former are a privileged ethnic group and the latter are a disempowered native people, in both the AJA baseball league and OHA cases I contend that neoconservative arguments focused on individual rights, individual equality and “racial discrimination” were used to challenge their respective descent-based eligibility requirements. Those cases can be seen as local manifestations of the nation-wide neoconservative political movement that seeks to establish a “color blind” society in which race has no legal, political or other formal significance in the distribution of rights and benefits (see Omi and Winant 1994:117, 128–132). However, the ultimate consequences of this movement in Hawai‘i may be far more severe for Native Hawaiians who are being threatened with the loss of their rights to self determination.

Playing Hard Ball

After it became known that the Board of Directors of the O‘ahu AJA Senior Baseball League (hereafter AJA League) had voted not to change its
Japanese-only rule to allow Blanchette to participate, the decision became the subject of quite contentious public discussion and was no longer an issue of concern only to the Japanese American community. A substantial amount of public commentary appeared in the print media including the two Honolulu daily newspapers and the Japanese American community newspaper, The Hawaii Herald, over a period of several months in fall 1996. Editors and columnists of the Honolulu newspapers expressed strong opposition to the board decision, while letters sent to the newspapers from the general public, including Japanese Americans and non-Japanese, were either opposed or supportive of the decision. The disagreement concerning the board decision centered on whether the AJA League had engaged in racial discrimination when it prohibited Blanchette from playing solely because he is not Japanese. Blanchette, who was an anthropology major at the University of Hawai‘i, himself recognized the racialized nature of the controversy in his observation: “It’s a baseball issue that unfortunately became a race issue.” Such racialization of seemingly nonracial issues is quite common in Hawai‘i given the pervasive significance of ethnicity as the dominant organizing principle of social relations insofar as ethnicity regulates the distribution of socioeconomic status and maintains the institutionalized inequality among ethnic/racial groups (Okamura 1998b:187). The degree of public interest given to an unannounced decision by a private organization concerning an amateur baseball league that attracts little attention except among a relatively small group of followers clearly demonstrates that the controversy extended well beyond the Japanese American community.

As noted above, the primary argument advanced by those who supported retaining the AJA League for Japanese only is that the league is part of the “cultural tradition” of Japanese Americans in Hawai‘i. They emphasized the “history” of Japanese-only teams and leagues since the 1900s and view the AJA League with considerable pride as a long-time community institution developed and maintained by Japanese Americans. In noting that most of the players in the league would not be opposed to a non-Japanese being allowed to join, a player nonetheless remarked, “But that’s because we’re not in touch with the history of the league. But the [older] officials of the league are. They know the history. Would you want to be the person to end a tradition that’s been standing for 30, 40, 50 years?” (quoted in Santoki 1996:A15). 2

In a letter to the Honolulu Advertiser (“Pendulum swings on racism—but enough, already,” Oct. 18, 1996), the writer contended that the controversy over the Japanese-only rule was due to “outsiders from the mainland” not understanding local cultural traditions that are not racist in nature.

People from the Mainland do not understand the diverse cultures, traditions and ways of the Islands. We respect another’s ways of doing things that an outsider does not understand. The board of the AJA League is not prejudiced but is upholding our cultural tradition. . . . Hopefully, the newcomers to the state will try to learn the traditions and local ways of the diverse cultures of Hawaii and not judge it (sic) to be racial. Let’s try to live together without causing any controversy.

Another letter writer commented that other groups in Hawai‘i have ethnically exclusive institutions such as the Kamehameha Schools for Native Hawaiians, the Narcissus Queen contest for Chinese Americans, and the Miss Filipina Hawai‘i contest for Filipino Americans.

Thus in advancing their argument, supporters of the Japanese-only rule can be seen to invoke principles related to cultural pluralism, that is, that racial/ethnic minorities have the right to maintain and practice their cultural traditions, beliefs and values, especially if they are part of the historical legacy of a group. Similar arguments are made by other racial/ethnic groups in Hawai‘i in support of their being allowed to continue various cultural traditions and practices such as exploding firecrackers on New Year’s Day.

Thus, supporters of the Japanese-descent rule appear to have rearticulated familiar and accepted beliefs and values concerning the maintenance of cultural traditions by investing them with a new but restricted meaning that included ethnically exclusive practices. While emphasizing the historical tradition of Japanese American baseball, supporters of the Japanese-only rule chose to ignore the ethnically restrictive nature of that tradition which contradicts another historical practice and value in Hawai‘i, the sharing of cultural traditions, practices and beliefs with other groups.

Despite the claims of upholding the cultural tradition of allowing only Japanese Americans to participate in the AJA League, that rule has been subject to both reinterpretation and violation over the years. In the early 1950s a controversy emerged when Robert Kaneko became the first half-Japanese player admitted into the league. He was fortunate to have a Japanese surname because part-Japanese Americans with non-Japanese fathers were not permitted into the league until later (Chinen 1996:A11). At present, as long as a player is of some Japanese descent, he is considered eligible. However, as recently as 1996, the same year that Blanchette asked to play in the league, a player, who
by his own admission was not Japanese, had been competing for the same AJA League team for eight years (Santoki 1996:A14). Only when he tried to change teams was his eligibility successfully challenged by another team manager, and he was banned from the league.

As stated above, the decision by the AJA League not to permit non-Japanese to participate generated considerable public controversy. Critics of the Japanese-only rule contended that it is a form of racial discrimination insofar as it denies individuals from playing in the league solely on the basis of race. They especially pointed out that the league uses City and County of Honolulu parks for its games and therefore should be subject to government laws that prohibit such discrimination in the use of public facilities. An opponent wrote, “If the single qualifying factor [for playing in the league] is race, how far have we come after all toward a melting pot where all persons are created equal and have equal rights?” A sports writer for the Honolulu Star-Bulletin maintained, “This is the United States of America, and I have no sympathy for any organization that argues to maintain ethnic purity in its membership. Especially not when that organization is using public parks funded by my tax dollars” (“Pure AJA has no place in public parks,” Oct. 4, 1996:C1).3

Thus, critics of the Japanese-descent rule can be seen to have expressed their arguments according to the well established and accepted principles of equal rights and equality of opportunity. They considered the AJA League to be a racial anachronism that somehow has been allowed to continue despite the formal end of government-supported racial segregation in the United States. However, opponents of the eligibility rule also can be said to have rearticulated the meaning of racial equality from a group to an individual concern in their emphasis on a person’s right to participate in the AJA League without regard to his race and on discrimination against individuals rather than disadvantaged racial minorities. Their arguments thus are quite similar to neoconservative attacks against affirmative action that successfully reinterpreted the meaning of racial discrimination as a violation of individual rights that, as such, could apply to both whites and nonwhites (Omi and Winant 1994:131). However, as Omi and Winant (1994:131, emphasis in original) have observed, “By limiting themselves to considering discrimination against individuals, . . . the neoconservatives trivialized the problem of racial equality, and of equality in general.” This trivialization of racial inequality from the group to the individual level explains why critics of the Japanese-only rule limited the scope of their concern solely to the controversy itself, that is, to the AJA League and its rule, and did not address other social arenas in which racial inequality and discrimination persist in Hawai‘i.

The neoconservative opponents of the Japanese-only rule are either unable or unwilling to see other far more significant forms of racial and other discrimination prevalent in Hawai‘i such as in employment, education, government and the law. If they are seriously concerned with eliminating racial discrimination, as the contentious tone of their editorials and letters to the editor seem to indicate, then their efforts would be better spent on attacking these much more critical manifestations of institutional discrimination that severely restrict the opportunities and access of groups such as Samoans, African Americans, Filipino Americans and Native Hawaiians. But their rearticulation of the meaning of racial equality and discrimination as issues concerning individual rights served as a convenient means for them to avoid having to confront collective inequalities and injustices based on race faced by minority groups.

An editorial in the Honolulu Advertiser argued that opening the AJA League to non-Japanese Americans “should spur other ‘institutions’ to look anew at their ethnically based policies” (“AJA baseball league should open its doors,” Oct. 3, 1996). But instead of citing as examples of such institutions government agencies and private corporations that continue to discriminate against racial and ethnic minorities in their hiring, promotion and contracting practices or that have done little to recruit and advance minorities despite their avowed equal employment opportunity and affirmative action policies, the editorial provided a trivial and incorrect example of the Cherry Blossom Pageant that supposedly required its contestants to have Japanese surnames.4 If the Advertiser and other media agencies are seriously concerned about ongoing racial discrimination in Hawai‘i, there are obviously many more critical cases for them to investigate and publicize than amateur baseball leagues and beauty contests. But rearticulation of the meaning of racial discrimination enabled the Advertiser to criticize a baseball league and thereby take up the cause of an individual white male so that he can play baseball on Sunday afternoons for three months of the year while many far more economically and politically disadvantaged groups are regularly denied equal opportunity solely because of their race in their pursuit of much more basic rights and services such as jobs, education, health care, and legal justice. As one of the strongest advocates of the “Hawai‘i multicultural model” that represents
island society as uniquely distinguished by ethnic tolerance and equality (see Okamura 1998a), the Honolulu dailies do not want to draw attention to the intolerance and institutionalized inequality that persist in Hawai‘i, and therefore they address less significant issues such as AJA baseball that will not disrupt the ethnic status quo.

**Opening the Cherry Blossom Pageant**

As stated above, in 1998 the Board of Directors of the Honolulu Japanese Junior Chamber of Commerce voted to allow part-Japanese (at least 50 percent) women to compete in its annual Cherry Blossom Queen pageant for the first time in the nearly 50 year history of the contest. While noting that it was overdue, the primary reason given by Jaycees officials for the rule change was that the queen needed to represent the multiethnic nature of the Japanese American community.

The Cherry Blossom Festival was notable as the only remaining major ethnic “beauty pageant” that required its contestants to be of “pure” descent. Participants in the Chinese Narcissus Festival must be at least 50 percent Chinese, while those in the Miss Filipina Hawai‘i pageant need only be of Filipino descent without any minimum specified. These more liberal eligibility rules reflect the high degree of intermarriage historically in both the Chinese American and Filipino American communities, both of which were dominated by males during their respective periods of plantation labor recruitment. In contrast, Japanese Americans historically had one of the lowest outmarriage rates and since 1900 have been the largest or second largest ethnic group in Hawai‘i. Thus the rule change by the Jaycees was not due to an increasing difficulty in finding sufficient numbers of full Japanese American women to compete in the pageant as has been the case with similar Japanese American beauty contests on the west coast.5

Although they occurred much earlier, public acknowledgment and acceptance of the multiracial/ethnic composition of the Japanese American community are evident in the Permanent Gallery of the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai‘i in Honolulu which opened in 1994. The very last exhibit in the gallery, which is concerned with the Japanese American historical experience in Hawai‘i since labor migration in the late 1800s, is a five by four foot mural consisting of black and white photographs of the faces of four generations of male and female Japanese (Iseesi, Nisei, Sansei and Yonsei) with each generation arranged in a column of twelve photographs. What probably is apparent even to non-Japanese as one views the photographs is the increasing presence of faces of individuals of multiracial or multiethnic descent, beginning particularly with the Sansei and becoming very obvious with the Yonsei. The significant number of these photos among both the Sansei and Yonsei generations clearly is meant to represent the substantial presence of part-Japanese among those generations and their acceptance in the Japanese American community.

Thus, the change in its descent-eligibility rule by the Jaycees to allow part-Japanese women to compete in its Cherry Blossom Pageant constitutes an established organization trying to catch-up with the social and cultural reality in the larger community. Then Jaycees President Keith Kamisugi acknowledged this delay in his comment that, “The pageant was behind the times. The community is already extensively multi-ethnic. We should have done this years ago” ("Queen says culture is a state of mind," Honolulu Star-Bulletin, March 22, 1999:A3). Changing the descent rule had been formally discussed in 1984 and again in 1993, but on both occasions the proposed change was defeated by the Jaycees Board of Directors on the basis that “If it’s not broken, why fix it?” (Battad 1998:A1). Another reason given in the past for not allowing part-Japanese women to participate was that it would diminish the “ethnic integrity” of the pageant (see King 2002).6 However, while the rule and the pageant may not have appeared to be in need of fixing, there was an obvious noncorrespondence between the pageant contestants (and queens) and the larger Japanese American community they were supposed to represent; thus the Jaycees could be said to have been in denial about the substantial presence of part-Japanese in the community.

Given the resistance in the past to changing the 100 percent Japanese descent requirement, it is not surprising to learn that the rule change was not welcomed by all Jaycees members. Kamisugi acknowledged that the rule change resulted in “a great deal of skepticism among quite a few of our members and at least some of our past leaders” (cited in Infante 1999: A5). The continued resistance to making such a long overdue change is unfortunate because as a prominent and established organization in the Japanese American community, the Jaycees should be leading the community by establishing precedents for the rest of the community to follow. More than twenty years ago, the selection of the first Cherry Blossom Queen with an Okinawan name was noteworthy, long after the majority of Naichi (descendants of Japanese from mainland Japan) had accepted Okinawans as close friends and spouses.
Again, the Jaycees were following the example of the community and not leading it. However, it cannot be denied that the Jaycees have provided a vanguard leadership to the Japanese American community since its beginning in 1949. In the late 1950s they admitted non-Japanese as members, and in 1969 elected a Filipino American as their first non-Japanese president, perhaps reflecting the close friendships of the Sansei generation with members of other ethnic groups.

In 1999 several part-Japanese women competed in the Cherry Blossom Pageant for the first time, and in the following year the first part-Japanese queen, Vail Soyo Matsumoto who is part-Italian, was selected. Catherine Elizabeth Toth, who is of Japanese and Hungarian descent, won the title in 2001 as the first queen without a Japanese last name. In 2002 Lori Akiko Lokei Okinaga, who is part-Hawaiian, was chosen as the 50th queen. The very quick and multiple selections of part-Japanese women as Cherry Blossom Queen following the rule change could be taken as indicating that it was considered long overdue and the resistance to not having a full Japanese queen has been overcome.

Comparing Baseball and Beauty Queens

In comparing the respective decisions made by the AJA League and the Jaycees concerning their descent-based eligibility rules, it needs to be emphasized that the baseball league already had been allowing part-Japanese (at least those with Japanese surnames initially) to participate since the early 1950s. The decision that league officials faced of whether to permit non-Japanese to play went much further than that of the Jaycees Board of Directors who could be said to have finally followed a precedent established more than 40 years before by the baseball league. However, unlike a beauty pageant that selects an individual winner, baseball is a team activity, and a few part-Japanese team members do not have the same social impact as would a solitary, part-Japanese Cherry Blossom Queen. Again as a team sport, having a non-Japanese member of a baseball team who may not necessarily even play in a given game, it perhaps a less controversial issue for the AJA League, especially since it was known that non-Japanese had been playing in the league since the 1980s in open violation of its eligibility rule, albeit without formal approval. League officials could have considered various ways by which non-Japanese players could join a team without their having a major impact on the game such as by allowing only one player on each team.

The invoking of Japanese cultural tradition and culture in both cases is also instructive in accounting for the differences in positions taken by the AJA baseball league and the Jaycees. In expressing approval of the rule change permitting part-Japanese women to participate in the pageant, 1999 Cherry Blossom Queen Lori Murayama observed that, "Anyone can embrace the [Japanese] culture if they go in with an open heart and mind." ("Queen says culture is a state of mind." "Honolulu Star-Bulletin, Mar. 22, 1999:A3"). Similarly, former Jaycees president Keith Kamiyoshi maintained that the rule change "gives opportunity to more people of Hawaii to participate in learning about the Japanese culture." Thus, the Jaycees position is based on the generally accepted view of culture as being learned and not linked exclusively with a particular racial or ethnic group, while supporters of the Japanese-only rule in the AJA League case held an ethnically exclusive notion of cultural tradition.

One possible explanation for the difference in decisions made by the AJA League and the Jaycees concerns generational differences in their leadership. The leaders of the league are predominantly Nisei and Sansei, while Jaycees leaders and members are primarily fourth generation Yonsei since by nationally established Junior Chamber of Commerce rules they must be less than 39 years old." While the Nisei were at the forefront of opening up a highly racialized Hawai'i society in the 1950s and 1960s as labor leaders, legislators, union members, and supporters of a revitalized Democratic Party, they may not necessarily espouse the same progressive values of social justice and equality and economic reform that distinguished them during those decades. A letter writer, who identified himself as Japanese American, emphasized this change in social values in noting that the Japanese-only rule of the AJA League "runs counter to the idea the boys in the 100th [Infantry] Battalion and 442nd Regimental Combat Team fought for; fair play the American way." ("AJA baseball league defies what Japanese fought for," "Honolulu Star-Bulletin, Oct. 4, 1996:A13"). These Japanese American soldiers in World War II were overwhelmingly Nisei and became staunch supporters of the Democratic Party in the 1950s as it gained political power from the racist-dominated Republican Party that had held a stranglehold on local politics and government since Hawai'i formally became a U.S. territory in 1900. Along with other Nisei, a significant number of Japanese American WWII veterans were elected to office during the 1950s and 1960s and led the Democrats in the Territorial and State Legislatures in passing progressive legislation that fostered equal opportunity
in employment, education, law, and social services after a half-century of Republican oligarchical rule.

However, the great majority of the Nisei are in their seventies and eighties now and represent the grandparent generation of the Yonsei who are generally in their twenties and thirties. While the Yonsei are not viewed as being as liberal a generation in social values and beliefs as the Sansei were when they were at about the same age, the Yonsei may be considered far more open and progressive in their views concerning ethnic relations compared to the Nisei at present. Most of the players in the AJA League, who are generally Yonsei, were not opposed to permitting non-Japanese into the league. This difference in values and attitudes toward other ethnic groups between the Nisei and older Sansei leaders of the AJA League and the Yonsei leaders of the Jaycees very likely contributed to the different decisions made by those organizations concerning their respective descent-based eligibility rules. As noted by one of the AJA League team managers who had been inclined to allow Blanchette to play, “After talking with the older guys—the guys who have been with the [AJA] league a long time—I was convinced we should keep it closed” (“AJA will keep ethnic requirement,” Honolulu Advertiser, Oct. 2, 1996:C1). If the decision had been theirs to make, the Yonsei players in the league may very well have voted to permit non-Japanese to play.

The Politics of Ethnic Boundary Construction

The decisions by the AJA League not to admit non-Japanese into the league and by the Jaycees to include part-Japanese in the Cherry Blossom Pageant must not be viewed as issues of interest only to the organizations concerned or to the Japanese American community. The decision by the league received extensive coverage in the sports section of the two Honolulu dailies and was the subject of an editorial in one of the newspapers and of numerous “letters to the editor” sent to both papers by Japanese Americans and non-Japanese. Although less controversial, the rule change by the Jaycees was literally “front page news” in the Honolulu daily newspapers, in addition to the Japanese American community newspaper, The Hawaii Herald. The reason that these decisions by these organizations were of interest and concern to the larger society is because Japanese Americans are one of the larger and more privileged and powerful ethnic groups in Hawai’i, and the decisions themselves have implications for the relations between Japanese Americans and other island groups. Thus interest on the part of non-Japanese was not primarily focused on the AJA League or the Cherry Blossom Pageant but on the larger Japanese American community, particularly in the case of the more controversial decision by the AJA League.

While it might not have been their intent, in making their rule change the Jaycees addressed a stereotypic perception held by many ethnic groups in Hawai’i that Japanese Americans are clannish and restrictive in their personal and collective relations with others and that they are concerned to maintain certain socioeconomic benefits and resources, such as state government and other jobs, primarily for themselves (see Cooper and Daws 1985). Jaycees leaders are certainly aware of that perception among non-Japanese as evident from a comment by one of them concerning the rule change: “We didn’t want our pageant to stick out as being a sign of racial purity” (quoted in Battad 1998:A1). It is very likely that had the Jaycees Board of Directors voted not to allow part-Japanese women in the Cherry Blossom Pageant the organization and the larger Japanese American community would have been subject to the same vociferous criticism that the AJA League had received in 1996 as desiring to maintain its ethnic exclusiveness or “racial purity.” The decision by the AJA League not to admit non-Japanese certainly reinforced that negative view of Japanese Americans and exacerbated already problematic ethnic relations between Japanese Americans and other groups. Thus, the political significance of these two controversies transcends the ethnic boundaries of the Japanese American community to encompass its relations with other groups rather than being limited only to that community. In addition to defining membership in the Japanese American community, ethnic boundary construction also structures the relations between Japanese Americans and other groups by either including or excluding the latter from participating in organized activities.

In voting to uphold its Japanese-only rule, the directors of the AJA League appear to have engaged in a form of “defensive ethnicity” in which a racial/ethnic group acts to protect its interests, resources or privileges in response to a perceived threat from external forces. Commenting on a telephone call he had received from a City and County of Honolulu attorney after the controversy over the league’s decision had developed, AJA League president Homer Sheldon stated, “It got me on the edge because we’re going to have to start protecting the league. I mentioned to the field managers ... that we’re going to take a stand. And if they force us to allow another nationality in our league, we’re going to fold the league. We’re not going to give in” (quoted in Santoki 1996:A15). This hardline stance also was evident in the unanimous vote of the Board of Directors, apparently with no discussion of the
issue, against allowing Blanchette into the league. While a defensive ethnicity
reaction is understandable on the part of disadvantaged minorities in order to
protect their limited resources, a more politically and economically dominant
group such as Japanese Americans could have responded to such a request in
a more conciliatory manner and by seeking a compromise resolution to the
issue.

Franklin Odo and Susan Yim (1993:228) had predicted that the Japa-
nese American community would respond in such a defensive ethnicity
manner by “circling the wagons” if it perceived its political and economic
interests were being threatened. They contended Japanese Americans would
seek to protect their steadily declining areas of influence and engage in greater
favoritism rather than become more egalitarian and inclusive. It is one thing
to deny entry into an amateur baseball league and quite another to limit access
to other far more significant economic and political arenas in which Japanese
Americans exert a significant degree of power and control as evident from their
substantial representation or positions of authority. These areas include as
Department of Education teachers and principals, state and county govern-
ment white collar workers, state legislators, and appointed state administra-
tors. Japanese American overrepresentation in these and in other areas in
the private sector already has been criticized for some time by other racial/ethnic
groups as an indication of Japanese American favoritism for members of their
own group and discrimination against other groups. In 1976 the state
government settled out-of-court and paid $325,000 to more than 100 white
dental applicants who had sued the state claiming racial discrimination as
the reason for their lower passing rate on the dental board examinations compared
to Asian Americans (Kotani 1985:159).

In the mid 1980s former Ethnic Studies instructor and state legislator
Roland Kotani (1985:160) observed that, “Faced by anti-Japanese sentiments,
AJA politicians and government officials often reacted defensively.” He cited
a “powerful” member of the state House of Representatives who argued:

The white man is the minority in Hawaii politics. There is a tinge of envy
because there are so many Orientals in office. But we shouldn’t be ashamed.
The governor makes appointments. Why should he have to make excuses for
the large numbers of Orientals in office? If we went to the mainland, ... the
reverse would be true.

More recently, while not necessarily a case of defensive ethnicity but of
possible ethnic favoritism and abuse of power, in July 2002 several Japanese
American state government officials and private contractors were arrested on
theft and bribery charges in an alleged kickback scheme at the Honolulu
Airport ("Airport boss arrested in kickback scheme," Honolulu Star-Bulletin,
July 4, 2002:A1, A10). According to the state Attorney General, the scam
allegedly involved offering kickbacks to airport administrators in return for
state contracts for maintenance and repair work at the airport. It resulted in
more than doubling the annual expenses of airport maintenance projects from
$3 million previously to $7 million in 1999 and could be the largest misuse of
taxpayer funds in state history. Other criminal incidents of abuse of power by
Japanese American elected officials became evident in the early 2000s.10

As evident from the AJA baseball league and other cases, it would be
extremely unfortunate for Hawaii’s people if Japanese Americans continue to
respond to such challenges in a defensive manner by seeking to maintain their
power and privilege, for example, by favoring Japanese American applicants
for jobs or government contracts, while denying fair and equal access to non-
Japanese. Given their undeniable dominant socioeconomic and political status
in Hawaii (along with Chinese Americans and Haoles), Japanese Americans
as individuals and organizations should use their privileged positions to work
towards the creation and maintenance of equality of opportunity for disadvan-
taged groups in the islands. As noted by University of Hawaii’s English
racism and colonialism is not to malign local Japanese communities but rather
to hold ourselves accountable to a broader vision of justice.”

**Post-Rice Hawaii: Racializing Native Hawaiians**

Japanese Americans are certainly not the only ethnic or racial group in
Hawaii and the continental United States that has established formal descent-
based rules for determining eligibility to participate in organized programs or
activities. Other groups in Hawaii such as Chinese Americans and Filipino
Americans have developed comparable rules to ascertain eligibility for beauty
pageants, sports activities, and scholarships. As the indigenous people of
Hawaii in contrast to ethnic minorities that have immigrated and settled in
the islands, Native Hawaiians are distinctive among groups in Hawaii’s insofar as
descent-based eligibility rules have been established by and for them in both
the private and public sectors. Among private organizations, the Kamehameha
Schools give “preference” in admission to students of Native Hawaiian
ancestry in accordance with the 1884 will of Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop
that established the schools. Public institutions such as the Hawaii state and
federal governments have mandated descent-based requirements in order for Native Hawaiians to be eligible to receive certain entitlements designated for them such as tuition waivers at the University of Hawai‘i and homestead land through the state Department of Hawaiian Home Lands for which recipients by federal law must be at least 50 percent Hawaiian. But as Yamamoto and Iijima (2000) point out, as the native people of Hawai‘i, Native Hawaiians are not seeking privileges or handouts. Nor are they seeking racial preferences. Rather they are asserting international human rights: not simply the right to equality, but the right to self-determination; …not a right to “special treatment,” but to reconnect spiritually with their land and culture, not a right to participate in the U.S. polity, but a right to some form of governmental sovereignty.

However, the U.S. Supreme Court decision in the Rice v. Cayetano case threatens those state and federal rights specified for Native Hawaiians only. In response to Rice’s lawsuit filed initially in 1996 that claimed he was subject to racial discrimination because as a non-Hawaiian he was not allowed to vote in elections for trustees of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA), the court’s decision in 2000 granted non-Hawaiians that privilege. In this case, the descent-based rule restricting voting for OHA trustees (who at that time had to be Native Hawaiian) only to Native Hawaiians was not established by Native Hawaiians themselves but by the majority of voters of the state of Hawai‘i when they approved the constitutional amendment that created OHA in 1978.

The lawsuit challenging the Native Hawaiians-only voting rule filed by Rice, a wealthy descendant of a missionary family that came to Hawai‘i in the early nineteenth century, and the criticisms of that rule expressed after the Supreme Court decision can be viewed as attacks against Native Hawaiians and not the rule per se. Given the absence of much public discussion, I do not believe that there was a great interest, at least prior to the Supreme Court ruling, among non-Hawaiians to vote in the elections for OHA trustees. Thus the attacks against the restricted nature of the voting extend beyond the OHA elections and are really directed against what are referred to as the “special benefits” and “racial preferences” that Native Hawaiians have been receiving and are currently seeking, particularly sovereignty. While Rice and his attorneys may have invoked the need to ensure equality and equal rights in their legal arguments claiming “reverse racial discrimination” against Rice, the principal goal of their suit was to keep Native Hawaiians in their subordinate and disempowered status in the United States and thereby to maintain colonial rule over them.

That this was really their ultimate objective became clear the day after the Supreme Court decision was announced when one of Rice’s attorneys, John W. Goemans, emboldened by their victory, declared that all “race-based” government programs for Native Hawaiians would be legally challenged:

What the Supreme Court has done with this ruling, narrow as it may seem, is say [that] Native Hawaiian is a racial characterization… and that means that all government programs, state and federal, for Native Hawaiians are race-based, presumptively unconstitutional and up for challenge ("Lawyer: Rice’s win will mean more suits," Honolulu Star-Bulletin, Feb. 24, 2000:A1).

Goemans continued that potential cases could include challenging programs for Native Hawaiians that provide homestead land, housing grants, gathering rights, and health and education services. A month later, he maintained that several non-Hawaiians wanted to run in the OHA trustee elections and that he would sue on their behalf if their candidacy was denied on the basis that they are not Hawaiian (“Non-Hawaiians will sue to run for OHA,” Honolulu Star-Bulletin, March 30, 2000:A1). After a white male, Kenneth Conklin, was denied nomination papers in June 2000 to seek office as an OHA trustee because he is not Hawaiian, such a suit was filed the next month by attorney William Burgess in a case, Earl Arakaki et al. v. the State of Hawai‘i, in which Arakaki (first plaintiff listed alphabetically) and other Hawai‘i residents claimed the Rice decision gave non-Hawaiians the right to run for OHA trustee. In September 2000 a U.S. district judge decided in their favor that non-Hawaiians could seek office as OHA trustee, and in her ruling quoted Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia in his concurrence with the court’s Adarand decision: “to pursue the concept of racial entitlement—even for the most admirable and benign of purposes—is to reinforce and preserve for future mischief the way of thinking that produced race slavery, race privilege and race hatred” (quoted in “The state of the Hawaiian,” Honolulu Advertiser, Jan. 7, 2001). The citing of this statement to support a legal decision concerning Native Hawaiians clearly captures how successful the opponents of Native Hawaiian rights have been in distorting those rights as resulting in “race privilege and race hatred.”

That same month all nine OHA trustees resigned their positions rather than be forced out by Governor Ben Cayetano who had earlier indicated he would seek to have them removed from office after the Hawai‘i Supreme Court
ruled the state could challenge their authority as trustees by filing a petition with the high court ("Cayetano: OHA trustees must step down," Honolulu Star-Bulletin, Aug. 30, 2000:A4). Within a little more than a week of their resignation, Cayetano appointed an interim OHA board that included a Japanese American businessman and 442nd Regimental Combat Team veteran, Charles Ota, as the first non-Hawaiian to serve as a trustee. Ota, together with more than a dozen non-Hawaiians, ran for OHA trustee in the November 2000 elections and was the only one elected after receiving more than 100,000 votes.

On another front, in April 2000 another of Rice's attorneys announced that his law firm would file a "reverse discrimination" suit within the next six months to eliminate educational and other programs for Native Hawaiians ("Lawyer may sue against Hawaiian benefits," Honolulu Star-Bulletin, April 8, 2000:A3). Referring to the Rice decision, he added, "So I see this as a milestone in the sense that it has brought realization to the people of this state that nothing is sacred anymore, that all programs are going to be looked at, going to be revisited." Two such programs, OHA and the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands (DHHL), were targeted in a federal lawsuit filed on October 3, 2000 on behalf of a white male, Patrick Barrett, that challenged the constitutionality of Article 12 of the Hawai'i Constitution that established OHA, adopted the federal Hawaiian Homes Commission Act and provided for Hawaiian gathering rights on private property. Barrett's attorney, Patrick Hanifin, contended that since the Rice decision defined Hawaiian as a "racial classification" and government programs cannot discriminate on the basis of race, therefore services and benefits provided by OHA and DHHL should be open to all Hawai‘i state residents without regard to race ("Hawaiian benefits face legal challenge," Honolulu Star-Bulletin, July 1, 2001:A12).

Barrett's lawsuit was dismissed in July 2001 on the basis that he had no legal standing to file it because, among other reasons, he could not demonstrate he would benefit from an OHA business loan and had admitted he had never attempted and had no plans to gather natural materials on private property ("Barrett loses OHA lawsuit," Honolulu Star-Bulletin, July 13, 2001). In February 2002 another suit against OHA filed by John Carroll, former chair of the Hawai‘i Republican Party and a Republican candidate for governor in 2002, was similarly dismissed in U.S. District Court on the grounds that he lacked legal standing since he had not attempted to obtain any benefits from OHA ("Federal judge rejects suit against OHA," Honolulu Advertiser, Feb. 20, 2002). In very likely a coordinated campaign, Carroll had sued on October 2, 2000 (the day before Barrett's suit was filed) to prohibit the state from making revenue payments from the ceded lands trust to OHA and to stop the latter from funding its programs because, according to him, OHA provides services only to Native Hawaiians and thus violates his 14th Amendment rights to equal protection.

Following the rulings in the Barrett and Carroll lawsuits, yet another suit against OHA and DHHL was filed in March 2002 by William Burgess and Patrick Hanifin, the attorneys who had represented plaintiffs in previous cases against Native Hawaiian rights, that again challenges the constitutionality of OHA and DHHL and seeks to abolish both state agencies. The suit (sometimes referred to as "Arakaki II") was filed on behalf of sixteen plaintiffs from various racial and ethnic groups, most of whom were parties in the Arakaki et al. v. State of Hawai‘i case that resulted in non-Hawaiians being allowed to run for OHA trustee. Burgess has described OHA and DHHL as the "mothership of racial discrimination" because, according to him, they use taxpayer funds to serve unequally only Native Hawaiians in violation of the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment ("Suit alleges OHA discrimination," Honolulu Star-Bulletin, March 5, 2002:A3).

William Burgess and his wife Sandra, who is part-Hawaiian, have been at the forefront of what has clearly emerged as a political movement, sometimes called "Aloha for All" by its leaders, to eliminate state agencies and programs for Native Hawaiians following the Rice decision. Burgess explains their position:

We believe in advocating for aloha for all, which means that all citizens, whatever their ancestry, are entitled to equal protection of the law. The Office of Hawaiian Affairs and Department of Hawaiian Home Lands not only divide people according to race, they send a message to Hawaiian people that they cannot be successful or make it on their own in the world without help from government ("Challenging OHA with Aloha for All," MidWeek, Jan. 2, 2002:6).

As evident from the above, Burgess and his followers are strong advocates of neoconservative racial politics, a major objective of which is to eliminate the formal significance of race towards the establishment of a "color blind" America in which race has no legal basis in the allocation of resources or benefits, and everyone is treated equally as individuals by the state. Like other neoconservatives, including those who accused the AJA League of committing
racial discrimination against Blanchette, Burgess and his group emphasize individual rather than group equality and thus view racial discrimination as fundamentally a denial of individual rights, whether those of whites or non-whites. In keeping with neoconservative arguments, they also contend that economic success results from individual hard work and achievement and personal responsibility rather than from what they contend are government "handouts" and special "race-based privileges" being bestowed upon Native Hawaiians through OHA and DHHL.

To garner support for their views and to obscure their real objective of perpetuating the political and economic subjugation of Native Hawaiians, in their arguments Burgess and his followers appropriate elements of the Hawai‘i multicultural model that maintains the islands are a setting of especially tolerant, harmonious and egalitarian ethnic relations (see Okamura 1998a). They contend that such harmony and equality are being threatened by the "racial discrimination" and "racial preferences" of the state government in its provision of Native Hawaiian rights through OHA and DHHL. On their website (http://alohaforall.org) maintained by Burgess and his wife, they contend:

Hawaii’s gift to the world is the Aloha spirit embodied daily in the beautiful people of many races living here in relative harmony. . . . It is not in keeping with the spirit of Aloha for the government to give one racial group land or money or special privileges or preferences from which all other racial groups in Hawaii are excluded.

They also direct specific criticism to Hawaiian sovereignty advocates and their supposed "racial agenda": "In the activists' demands for 'sovereignty' or 'entitlements' we hear echoes of apartheid, ethnic cleansing, white supremacy and other concepts based on racial discrimination." While Burgess and his followers argue that race should have no legal significance in society in the distribution of services and privileges, they nonetheless racialize Native Hawaiians by categorizing them as a race so that programs established for their benefit can be contested as racially discriminatory. The misrepresentation of Native Hawaiians as a "racial group" seeking to maintain "racial preferences" for themselves prevents Burgess and his followers, the U.S. Supreme Court, and supporters of the court's Rice decision from acknowledging that Native Hawaiians are Na Kanaka Maoli, the indigenous people of Hawai‘i, with consequent unique rights that ethnic and racial groups cannot claim. Instead, Burgess and his wife maintain that:

individuals of Hawaiian ancestry are just like the rest of us. Hawaiians are not a "people" separate from the state’s other citizens. They are not a "tribe," not a "sovereign nation." They are one among many ethnic groups in the state, entitled to the same respect we give all those groups and their valued cultures—but not more (http://alohaforall.org).

The problem with this line of thinking is that the "rest of us" are all immigrant settlers in Hawai‘i and thus cannot claim native status or rights as can Native Hawaiians. The latter therefore have an unique political and legal status in Hawai‘i rather than being "one among many" ethnic or racial groups and cannot be treated as though their historical experiences, especially sovereignty, are comparable to those of other groups. However, from the neoconservative perspective, Native Hawaiians and Japanese Americans are equally "ethnic groups," and hence both OHA and the AJA baseball league came under their attack as racially discriminatory.

Rice's suit and some of the other lawsuits against Native Hawaiian rights were funded by right-wing organizations such as the Campaign for a Color Blind America and were assisted by law firms based on the U.S. continent, indicative of the larger political significance of the issue beyond Hawai‘i and Native Hawaiians. The emergence of these suits was very likely encouraged by the anti-affirmative action movement that gained substantial ground in the 1990s with the prohibition of race-based affirmative action in California, Florida, Georgia, Texas and Washington and with ongoing legal challenges in courts across the nation (Schmidt 2002). Thus the Rice decision, as narrow as it was in ruling only on who can vote in OHA elections, has ushered in a new era in social relations in Hawai‘i, that is, "Post-Rice Hawai‘i." The decision already has resulted in the elimination of Native Hawaiians-only rights to vote and seek office in OHA elections and in ongoing legal and political challenges to their remaining rights and may result in similar lawsuits against programs and services designated for racial and ethnic minorities in Hawai‘i.

In 2001, the Kamehameha Schools indicated that it would no longer apply for or accept federal funds that amounted to more than $2 million annually in recent years for programs such as college scholarships and free and reduced-price lunches. In a more controversial decision in July 2002, the schools announced that its Maui campus had accepted a non-Hawaiian student for the coming school year because the pool of academically-qualified Native Hawaiian applicants had been exhausted. These decisions very likely were made because of a valid concern that the schools’ admissions policy,
which gives "preference" to Native Hawaiians "to the extent permitted by law and the rules governing tax-exempt organizations" ("Non-Hawaiian given campus spot," Honolulu Advertiser, July 12, 2002:A5), and its tax-exempt status would be legally contested by neoconservative groups since organizations that receive federal monies are prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race. Cognizant of this threat, J. Douglas Ing, chair of the Board of Trustees of the Ke Aliʻi Puaahi Foundation that oversees the Kamehameha Schools, stated, "There is ongoing a very great chess game. There are those in this country who would like to erode if not eliminate rights for indigenous and native people. We’re attempting to protect the admissions policy. To do that it may be necessary for us to give up a pawn here and a pawn there" (quoted in “Kamehameha may alter its admissions policy,” Honolulu Advertiser, July 16, 2002). In fact, in 1997 "Freddy" Rice filed two federal lawsuits against the schools' admissions policy; one challenged it as a violation of civil rights, and the other charged the policy as violating tax laws. Both suits were later withdrawn by Rice’s attorneys because he lacked sufficient funds to proceed with them in addition to his suit against OHA ("Hawaiians first, alumni say," Honolulu Advertiser, July 13, 2002:A2). Elimination of and lawsuits against race-based programs are very much part of the overall neoconservative shift in racial politics since the 1970s, but they also, and perhaps more significantly, represent a gigantic leap backwards in efforts to abolish racial inequality, injustice and discrimination in society.

Conclusion

The three cases discussed above, that is, playing in the AJA baseball league, competing in the Cherry Blossom Pageant, and holding Native Hawaiian rights all were focused on descent-based rules that determined eligibility to participate in those activities. As I have argued, ethnic boundary making in Hawai‘i is not an issue limited to the group concerned but has important implications for the political and economic relations between that group and other ethnic/racial groups insofar as the constructed boundary may restrict the participation of the latter in an organized activity or program and thus may be subject to challenge.

Economically and politically dominant groups such as Japanese Americans have the power to exclude others from participation in activities and organizations they control as in the Cherry Blossom Pageant and AJA baseball league cases. The latter incident constituted an opportunity for Japanese Americans to respond by upholding principles of social equality and inclusive-

ness, but such was not the case because of the increasing defensive ethnicity of the community to retain control over its interests and resources. The unwillingness of the AJA League to revise its eligibility rule reinforced the view among many non-Japanese that Japanese Americans are primarily concerned to maintain their political and economic power in social arenas they control without regard to the status or concerns of other groups.

In the case of Native Hawaiians, descent-based eligibility rules previously established by the state and federal governments for their sole benefit are currently being contested because, despite their continuing subordinate political and economic status, Native Hawaiians have been making significant progress in having their rights and claims as Na Kanaka Maoli, the indigenous people of Hawai‘i, recognized by the state and federal governments. The sovereignty movement to establish a self-governing Hawaiian nation has gained substantial Native Hawaiian community support since its emergence in the 1980s. Thus, driven by the neoconservative political movement, the objective of lawsuits against rights designated specifically for Native Hawaiians, as in the Rice, Arakaki et al., Barrett, Carroll and “Arakaki II” cases, and of other legal and political challenges that are very likely to follow, is to maintain Native Hawaiians in their colonized and disempowered status in their homeland by abolishing rights that had previously been granted only to them or that they had enjoyed as a sovereign nation.

Notes

I would like to thank Candace Fujikane and John Rosa for their critical and very useful comments and suggestions for revision of an earlier draft of this article.

1. I use the term "descent-based" instead of "race-based" because Native Hawaiians are not a race or an ethnic minority but the native people of Hawai‘i.

2. While supporters of the Japanese-descent rule note that the O‘ahu AJA Senior League is the premier amateur baseball league in the state in terms of the level of competition and organization, they do not mention that the level of skill and knowledge in baseball attained by Japanese Americans over the years is another likely reason that supporters of the Japanese-only rule would like to maintain the AJA League only for Japanese Americans because baseball is commonly acknowledged to be "their game" in Hawai‘i.

3. However, City and County of Honolulu officials stated that any not-for-profit organization can use its facilities, and this position was affirmed by the Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission ("AJA will keep ethnic requirement," Honolulu Advertiser, Oct. 2, 1996:C4).
At that time Cherry Blossom Pageant contestants were required to be full Japanese by descent whatever their last name might be.

King (2002) has noted that in order to increase the pool of possible candidates Japanese American pageants in Los Angeles and San Francisco require contestants to be only half Japanese or even less as in Seattle.

Another possible reason for the resistance to permitting part Japanese to compete in the pageant is that Japan based corporations are major pageant sponsors and provide an expenses paid trip to Japan for the queen and her court. Concern has been expressed about how representatives of these corporate sponsors in Japan would react to a victory by a part Japanese queen (Toth 2001).

The Jaycees extended membership to women in 1984 and elected their first woman president five years later.

Jaycees members including officers and board members consist of a significant number of non Japanese.

I base this statement on interviews conducted with current and former AJA baseball league players who were predominantly Yonsei.

In July 2001 former Honolulu City Councilman Andy Minakami was convicted on federal charges of bribery, theft, extortion, wire fraud and two counts of witness tampering in a salary bonus kickback scheme with two former members of his staff and received a sentence of four years and three months. In April 2002 another former City Council member, Rene Manusho plead guilty to felony theft of city funds and her campaign funds and was sentenced to one year in prison.

OHA was created in 1978 to develop and administer programs and services for Native Hawaiians. Formerly led by an elected Native Hawaiians only Board of Trustees it controls more than half a billion dollars in assets from the ceded lands that were Hawaiian government and crown lands seized by the United States when Hawai'i was annexed in 1898. Upon statehood in 1959 these lands were returned to the state to be held in trust partially for the benefit of Native Hawaiians (Yamamoto and Ijima 2000).

The press release regarding the lawsuit states that the plaintiffs represent Chinese Filipino Hawaiian Japanese Okinawan Portuguese and various European ethnicities including English French Spanish and Polynesian.

The plaintiffs in the suit to allow non-Hawaiians to seek office as OHA trustee also were represented by a Houston law firm Magenheim Bateman & Helfand which has challenged race-based programs in North Carolina and Florida before it withdrew from the case.

Until 1962 the schools had admitted the children of non-Hawaiian faculty and while its admissions policy does not formally exclude non-Hawaiian students none had been accepted in the past 40 years.

Nanoka Thompson, another trustee of the Ke Ali'i Pauahi Foundation, stated that a 1992 audit by the Arthur Andersen accounting firm indicated that if the foundation lost its tax exempt status it would have to pay $1 billion in back taxes and 42 percent of its earnings each year in federal taxes (Kamehameha trustees torn between duty and law Honolulu Advertiser July 17 2002 A6).

References

Airport boss arrested in kickback scheme 2002 Honolulu Star Bulletin July 4 pp A1 A10


AJA baseball league should open its doors 1996 Honolulu Advertiser October 3

AJA will keep ethnic requirement 1996 Honolulu Advertiser October 2 pp C1 C4

Aloha for All http://aloha4all.org

Barrett loses OHA lawsuit 2001 Honolulu Star Bulletin July 13

Batrad G 1998 Too Little Too Late The Hawaii Herald August 21 pp A1 A5

Cayetano OHA trustees must step down 2000 Honolulu Star Bulletin August 30 p A4

Challenging OHA with Aloha for All 2002 MidWeek January 2 pp 6 56

Chinen K 1996 Hawaii's AJAs Play Ball A Look Back at AJA Baseball The Hawaii Herald June 7 pp A1 A10 A11

Cooper G and G Daws 1985 Land and Power in Hawaii The Democratic Years Honolulu Benchmark Books

Federal judge rejects suit against OHA 2002 Honolulu Advertiser February 20


Hawaiian benefits face legal challenge 2001 Honolulu Star Bulletin July 1 p A12

Hawaiians first alumni say 2002 Honolulu Advertiser July 13 pp A1 A2


Kamehameha may alter its admissions policy 2002 Honolulu Advertiser July 16

Kamehameha trustees torn between duty and law 2002 Honolulu Advertiser July 17 p A6
Japanese Americans
in Hawai‘i:
Bibliography for 1988–2001

JONATHAN Y OKAMURA

This bibliography encompasses the period from 1988 when The Japanese in Hawai‘i: A Bibliography of Publications, Audiovisual Media and Archival Collections was published through 2001. That work by Joan Hori Curator of the Hawaiian Collection at Hamilton Library at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa was intended to update and supplement two previous bibliographies. The Japanese in Hawai‘i 1868–1967: A Bibliography of the First Hundred Years by Mitsugi Matsuda (1968) and The Japanese in Hawai‘i An Annotated Bibliography of Japanese Americans by Dennis Ogawa (1975) that was a revised and updated version of Matsuda’s work. The present bibliography includes published and unpublished materials produced since 1987 in English although relevant works in Japanese are available at the UH Manoa Libraries. The great majority of the entries are available at those libraries. The bibliography includes primarily sources on the resident Japanese American population in Hawai‘i and excludes materials on Japanese tourists and businessmen and Japanese tourism and investment during the period concerned. Also omitted are works on Japanese Americans on the U.S. continent or Japanese Americans in general.

The bibliography consists of two main sections: the first on Books, Theses and Articles and the second on Video Recordings and Music Recordings. Sources in the first section have been categorized into a number of subject headings that represent areas of research interest in Japanese American studies in Hawai‘i both at present and in the past. Besides scholars, a substantial number of books and videos were produced by Japanese American private organizations and individuals, for example, by World War II veterans groups due to the observance of fiftieth anniversaries that occurred during the decade of the 1990s.
All of the entries listed in the Video Recordings and Music Recordings section of this bibliography are available from the Wong Audio Visual Center at Sinclair Library at UH Manoa. The description of the contents and features of each video is based on information provided in the Hawai‘i Voyager Library Catalog of the UH Libraries. The categories used to classify the videos are the same as those for the Books, Theses, and Articles section of this bibliography. A few videos produced in 1987 are included because they were not listed in Joan Hori’s bibliography.

Information for this bibliography was obtained from a number of sources, the primary being the Hawai‘i Voyager Library Catalog. For articles published in scholarly refereed journals I used the EBSCOHost electronic database available through the UH Manoa Libraries. Doctoral dissertations and master’s theses completed at UH Manoa between August 1998 and August 2000 have not yet been listed in the Voyager Catalog, but information on them was obtained from an online database. Dissertations and Theses of the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa (http://www2.hawaii.edu/~speccoll/hawain48.htm) compiled by Andrea L. Nakamura. Only those from the social sciences, humanities, and education fields have been included.

Several journals that specialize in Asian American topics such as Amerasia Journal, the Journal of Asian American Studies, Social Process in Hawai‘i, and The Hawaiian Journal of History were reviewed. I also examined the 1971–1997 Cumulative Article Index for Amerasia Journal published by the UCLA Asian American Studies Center (1998), the annual bibliographies published in Amerasia from 1988 through 2000, and the anthologies of papers presented at the annual conference of the Association for Asian American Studies. Relevant articles published in edited books are most likely not to have been included in this bibliography.

Books, Theses, and Articles

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*Humanity above Nation: The Impact of Manjiro and Heco on America and Japan* 1995 Honolulu Joseph Heco Society of Hawaii and Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii

**World War II, Military Service and Internment**

Chang T 1992 *I Can Never Forget Men of the 100th/442nd* Honolulu Sigi Productions


Kawakami B F 1993 *Japanese Immigrant Clothing in Hawai‘i* 1885–1941 Honolulu University of Hawai‘i Press


Kimura Y 1988 *Issei Japanese Immigrants in Hawai‘i* Honolulu University of Hawai‘i Press


Ota M 1995 The Father of Okinawan Immigration Kyozo Toyama Kokusai Kanketsu Kenkyu 15(3) 59–71

*To Our Issei Our Heartfelt Gratitude* 2000 Honolulu Issei Commemorative Booklet Committee Okinawan Centennial Celebration

Saiki P S 1993 *Early Japanese Immigrants in Hawai‘i* Honolulu Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai‘i Distributed by University of Hawai‘i Press


Chronology of World War II Incarceration 1994 Japanese American National Museum Quarterly 9(3) 11–16
Clarke T 1991 Pearl Harbor Ghosts A Journey to Hawaii Then and New New York William Morrow
Duensing D E (ed) 2001 Americanism A Matter of Mind and Heart vol I The Military Intelligence Service Wahikuli HI Maui’s Sons and Daughters of the Nisei Veterans
An Era of Change Oral Histories of Civilians in World War II Hawaii 5 vols 1994 Honolulu Center for Oral History Social Science Research Institute University of Hawaii
Gallery of Heroes Honoring Hawaii’s Medal of Honor and Distinguished Service Cross Recipients 2001 Materials submitted by Hawaii Army Museum Society
Go for Books 1943–1993 1993 Commemorates 50th anniversary of 442nd Regimental Combat Team
Hawaii Holocaust Project 1993 Days of Rememberance Hawaii’s Witnesses to the Holocaust 2 vols Honolulu Center for Oral History Social Science Research Institute University of Hawaii
Hawaii Nikken History Editorial Board 1999 Japanese Eyes American Heirs Personal Reflections of Hawaii’s World War II Nisei Soldiers Honolulu Tendai Educational Foundation Distributed by University of Hawaii Press
Kikuchi Y 1995 The Pacific War of the Nisei in Hawaii Translated by Y H Honouchi Pearl City HI
Knaepler T K 1995 Our House Divided Seven Japanese American Families in World War II Honolulu University of Hawaii Press
Matsu D 1992 Boyhood to War History and Anecdotes of the 442nd RCT Honolulu Mutual Publishing
Menten L K 1994 Research Report Nisei Soldiers at Dachau Spring 1945 Holocaust and Genocide Studies 8(2) 258–274
Military Intelligence Service Veterans Club of Hawaii 2001 Secret Valor M15 Personnel World War II Pacific Theater pre Pearl Harbor to September 8 1951 Prepared for 50th anniversary reunion July 8–10 1993 Honolulu the Veterans
Moulon P 1993 U.S. Samurai in Brussels People of France and Japanese Americans France Peace & Freedom Trail
Myers D J 1991 Remembering Pearl Harbor Fifty Years Later Honolulu Daniel James Publishers
Nakahara L K Y 1996 The Evolution of the Japanese American Community in Wartime Hawaii Senior thesis Claremont McKenna College
Oba R 1993 The Men of Company F 2nd ed Honolulu
100th Infantry Battalion 55th Anniversary Reunion 1942–1997 Honolulu Club 100 Veterans of the 100th Infantry Battalion
Our Journey of Honor 1993 Pictures of week long celebration of 50th anniversary reunion of 442nd Regimental Combat Team in March 1993
Remembrances 100th Infantry Battalion 50th Anniversary Celebration 1942–1992 Honolulu 100th Infantry Battalion Publication Committee
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Yatagai, C. 1995. Videotapes on the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, 100th Infantry Battalion, 522nd Field Artillery Battalion, and 441st Counter Intelligence Corps Available in the Wong Audiovisual Center, Sinclair Library, University of Hawai‘i.

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Takagi, M. 1987. Moral Education in Pre-war Japanese Language Schools in Hawai‘i. MA thesis (Sociology), University of Hawai‘i, no. 1912.


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**Ethnicity and Community**


Education


Women


Bostwick, B.J.N. 1999. The Transference of Educational Values within an Okinawan Immigrant Family to Hawai‘i. MA thesis, California State University, Long Beach.


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Mori, I. 1999. Diary of Dr. Iga Mori, 2 microfilm reels.


Religion


**Culture and Customs**


Blummer, H.A. et al. (eds.). 1995. 101 Years of Kabuki in Hawai‘i. Department of Theatre and Dance, University of Hawai‘i.


1995. Opening Celebration of the Historical Gallery: “Sharing our Historical Roots.”


Pratt, C.M. 1996. Fit to be Tied: A Study of Japanese Wedding Ritual in the Cultural Contexts of Japan and Hawaii. MA thesis (Religion), University of Hawai‘i, no. 2565.

**Video Recordings and Music Recordings**

**Immigration and Issei**


Okinawan Celebration Special: "Otake Sama De." 1990. JN Productions. 1 videocassette (10 min.), sd., col., 1/2 in. Summary of opening ceremonies of celebration of 90th anniversary of Okinawan immigration to Hawai‘i.


Year of the Okinawan, Part 1 (Furusato). 1990. JN Productions. 1 videocassette (30 min.), sd., col. with b&c sequences, 1/2 in. Examines Okinawan immigration to Hawai‘i, why they left, from where they came and lifestyle on plantations where they worked.

World War II, Military Service and Internment

Aloha Sakura. 1994. JN Productions. 1 videocassette (49 min.), sd., col. with b&c sequences, 1/2 in. Recounts story of cherry blossom trees planted in Maizuru, Japan by Fujio Takaki, a Nisei soldier who was stationed there after World War II.

American at Heart. 1993. Paul Hara. 1 videocassette (70 min.), sd., col. with b&c sequences, 1/2 in. Describes World War II era in United States and Hawai‘i and cultural, social, and political factors that influenced Japanese Americans.


Japanese Americans in Hawai‘i: Bibliography


The 442nd: Duty, Honor and Loyalty. 1998. Distributed by Video Rights Corp. 1 videocassette (71 min.), sd., col. with b&c sequences, 1/2 in. Reassembled and translated version of documentary originally issued in Japanese on 442nd Regimental Combat Team and 100th Infantry Battalion during World War II.

Ganbare (Don’t Give Up!) 1994. Tom Moffat Multimedia. 1 videocassette (15 min.), sd., col., 1/2 in. Ganbare became anthem for many Japanese Americans in Hawai‘i following bombing of Pearl Harbor as they confronted fear and uncertainty.

From Hawai‘i to the Holocaust: A Shared Moment in History. 1993. Direct Cinema Ltd. 1 videocassette (53 min.), sd., col. with b&c sequences, 1/2 in. Japanese American veterans of 522nd Field Artillery Battalion of 100th/442nd Regimental Combat Team that helped liberate Dachau and Jewish survivors living in Hawai‘i share their personal memories of World War II.

It’s Peace! 1990. 1 videocassette (6 min.), si., col., 1/2 in. Features members of 442nd Regiment disembarking from ships at end of World War II and participating in ceremony at Iolani Palace.


Memory of War. 1991. KHON. 1 videocassette (30 min.), sd., col. with b&c sequences, 1/2 in. Hawai‘i residents give firsthand accounts of Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and of nearly 3,000 civilian and military casualties incurred that day.

Nisei Soldiers who Fought against Their Mother Country: Testimony after 50 Years of Silence. 1998. Nippon Golden Network. 1 videocassette (40
min.), sd., col. with b&w sequences, 1/2 in. Reviews contributions of Japanese American soldiers from Hawai‘i, especially those in Military Intelligence Service, through interviews and profiles of veterans on 50th anniversary of end of World War II.

**One Puka Puka: 100th Infantry Battalion.** 1992. Lee Enterprises. 1 videocassette (120 min.), sd., col. with b&w sequences, 1/2 in. Chronicles members of 100th Infantry Battalion and their families as they return to Italy to revisit areas they fought in during World War II.


**The Panel: The First Exchange.** 1989. Hawaii Holocaust Project. 1 videocassette (60 min.), sd., col. with b&w introduction, 1/2 in. Panel discussion with Jewish Holocaust survivors who live in Hawai‘i and Japanese American veterans of 522nd Field Artillery Battalion, some of whom were involved in liberation of Nazi concentration camp at Dachau.

**Return of the 442nd.** 1991. JN Productions. 1 videocassette (22 min.), si., col., 1/2 in. Film footage of return of 442nd Division and 100th Battalion to Hawai‘i at end of World War II, including arrival of ship at Honolulu Harbor, motorcade to Iolani Palace, laying of wreath at WWII memorial at Punchbowl and King Streets, and parade at Kapi‘olani Park.

**Reunion: The 50th Anniversary Celebration of the 442nd.** 1993. JN Productions. 1 videocassette (60 min.), sd., col. with b&w sequences, 1/2 in. Features anniversary celebration of 442nd Regimental Combat Team and follows their families and friends as they help to prepare it.

**Ethnicity and Community**

**Chui Shizii: The Okinawan Diary.** 1997. KITV. 1 videocassette (30 min.), sd., col. with b&w sequences, 1/2 in. Reviews history and contemporary status of Okinawans in Hawai‘i.

**A Cultural Commitment: Being Uchinanchu.** 1987. JN Productions. 1 videocassette (60 min.), sd., col., 1/2 in. Interviews with six Okinawans from Hawai‘i about their ethnic identity and culture and involvement in Okinawan Festival and in planning Okinawan Cultural Center.

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**Japanese Americans in Hawai‘i: Bibliography**

**Gateway to Our Legacy.** 1992. JN Productions. 1 videocassette (34 min.), sd., col. with b&w sequences, 1/2 in. Features people involved with establishment, fundraising, building and management of Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii.

**Hawaii Aloha.** 1993. Rii Kanzaki. 1 videocassette (34 min.), sd., col. with b&w sequences, 1/2 in. Explores Japanese American culture in Hawai‘i by focusing on personal experiences of Rii Kanzaki’s relatives, i.e., his Issei grandmother, Nisei mother and Yonsei daughter.

**Japanese Americans in Hawaii.** 1991. 1 sound cassette (15 min.), analog.

**The Japanese Cultural Center of Hawaii Historical Gallery: Preserving the Legacy of Japanese Americans in Hawaii.** 1995. 1 videocassette (65 min.), sd., col., 1/2 in. Introduces gallery, first in Hawai‘i to review history of Japanese Americans in Hawai‘i, and recognizes some individuals and volunteers who helped to establish it.

**Kipu, Kaua‘i Reunited and Remembered.** 1996. Kaua‘i Historical Society. 1 videocassette (20 min.), sd., col. with b&w sequences, 1/2 in. Former residents of Hule‘ia-Kipu reunited for first time in 50 years since closing of Hule‘ia School in 1946. Gives brief history of former plantation town and includes interviews with reunion attendees.


**Year of the Okinawan, Part 2 (UOA Study Tour).** 1990. JN Productions. 1 videocassette (60 min.), sd., col., 1/2 in. Follows 1989 United Okinawa Association annual study tour group to Okinawa.

**Year of the Okinawan, Part 3 (The Okinawan Connection).** 1990. JN Productions. 1 videocassette (60 min.), sd., col., 1/2 in. Discusses why Okinawa-Hawai‘i bond is strong.

**Year of the Okinawan, Part 4 (The ‘90s and Beyond).** 1990. JN Productions. 1 videocassette (30 min.), sd., col., 1/2 in. Looks at Okinawa today and its future and reviews direction young Okinawans in Hawai‘i will be taking in 1990s.
Women

Cherry Blossom Festival, 1990. JN Productions. 1 videocassette (30 min.), sd., col., 1/2 in. Presentation of 30th Cherry Blossom Festival.


Making Picture Bride. 1995. 1 videocassette (60 min.), sd., col., 1/2 in. Kayo Hatta and Diane Mark, director and producer, discuss difficulties of making accurate as well as entertaining historical film.


Picture Bride. 1995. Miramax Films in association with Thousand Cranes Filmworks. 1 videocassette (95 min.), sd., col., 1/2 in. Beautiful Japanese young woman goes to Hawaii to marry man she knows only through his picture. Although initially disappointed, she finds life in new land more exciting and satisfying than she expected.


Thirty-ninth Cherry Blossom Festival Special. 1991. JN Productions. 1 videocassette (30 min.), sd., col., 1/2 in. Highlights from reception introducing contestants for 39th Cherry Blossom Queen.

Biography

A Celebration of Lifetime Achievement. 1999. 1 videocassette (85 min.), sd., col. with b&c sequences, 1/2 in. Highlights lives of five men and their families who have served local community and helped to perpetuate Japanese culture and traditions: Yoshiharu Satoh, Masayuki Tokioka, Richard T. Mamiya, George Aritoshi, and Albert Kobayashi.

Hawaii’s Plantation Heroes. 1992. KHET. 1 videocassette (60 min.), sd., col. with b&c sequences, 1/2 in. Reviews life of Wally Yonamine, including upbringing on Maui plantation, attendance at Farrington High School, and performance as college football player and professional baseball player for Yomiuri Giants in Japan.

We Remember: The Kobayashi Story. 1991. Minicam Video Productions. 1 videocassette (23 min.), sd., col. with b&c sequences, 1/2 in. Commemorates 100th anniversary of Kobayashi Travel Service and features lives of brothers Unosuke and Kinjiro Kobayashi and their descendants from late 1800s to present.

Culture and Customs

Japanese New Year. 1994. 1 videocassette (60 min.), sd., col. with b&c sequences, 1/2 in. Explores religious and cultural celebration of Japanese New Year and its importance to Japanese Americans in Hawaii.


A Plantation Celebration. 1995. 1 videocassette (60 min.), sd., col. with b&c sequences, 1/2 in. Examines history of Christmas celebration and other cultural practices on Hawaii's plantations among various ethnic groups including Japanese.

3rd Honolulu Floating Lantern Ceremony. 1989. KHAI-TV. 1 videocassette (15 min.), sd., col., 1/2 in. Documents Toro Nagashi, or Buddhist

Traditional Japanese Foods for Modern Living. 1995. Nutrition Branch, Hawai‘i State Department of Health. 1 videocassette (11 min.), sd., col., 1/2 in. Promotes use of foods and nutrition concepts from Japanese culture and advocates investigation into their culture-based dietary choices and practices that have contributed to health and longevity of Japanese Americans in Hawai‘i.


Who Will Cut Next Year's Bamboo? 1991. JN Productions. 1 videocassette (60 min.), sd., col., 1/2 in. Features four Hawai‘i residents who are actively involved in perpetuating traditional Japanese cultural activities.

Music Recordings


Contributors

Candace Fujikane is an associate professor of English at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. Her current research focuses on Asian settler colonialism and intrasettler racism in Hawai‘i. In 2000, she co-edited with Jonathan Okamura a collection of essays entitled Whose Vision?: Asian Settler Colonialism in Hawai‘i, a special issue of the UCLA Asian American Studies Center’s Amerasia Journal.

Norman Kaneshiro received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Ethnic Studies from UH Mānoa in 2001. He has been a student of Okinawan classical music under the instruction of Harry S. Nakasone for the past fourteen years and has made several trips to Okinawa to supplement his study, most recently in 1999. Norman plays sanshin with the Nomura-ryu Ongaku Kyo Kai Okinawan classical music group.

Gaku Kinoshita is a doctoral student in cultural anthropology at UH Mānoa. His research interests include history and memory, ethnography of communication, ethnography of life story, and Japanese Americans in Hawai‘i. Gaku is currently conducting his dissertation fieldwork in Puna with Japanese American elderly.

Jonathan Y. Okamura is an assistant professor in the Ethnic Studies Department at UH Mānoa and a social anthropologist by training. His father’s family is from Yamaguchi prefecture and beginning with his great-great grandmother, Natsu, settled first at Kōele, Lana‘i sometime before April 3, 1890 when his great grandfather and great grandmother joined her. Jon is the author of Imagining the Filipino American Diaspora: Transnational Relations, Identities and Communities and articles on ethnicity and ethnic relations in Hawai‘i.

Carrie Y. Takahata was raised in Pearl City, Hawai‘i and graduated from Moanalua High School. She obtained Bachelor of Social Work and Master of Arts (English) degrees from the University of Hawai‘i. She currently works for the Developmental Disabilities Division of the state Department of Health as a contract specialist. Carrie has published her poetry in the Asian Pacific American Journal, Bamboo Ridge, Hawaii Review, Tinfish, and the Growing Up Local anthology.


Social Process in Hawai‘i

Editorial Policy

*Social Process in Hawai‘i* is a journal published by the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Department of Sociology with the objective of disseminating to scholars, students, and the community the results of outstanding social science research on the people and institutions of Hawai‘i.

Since this journal’s inception, the Department of Sociology has taken the view that the communities in Hawai‘i offer a rich and varied opportunity for observing the interplay of social processes which maintain stability and provoke social change. It is our hope that the journal might stimulate social research in Hawai‘i, provide materials for instruction of students, and enhance the understanding of the community among those who live and work here.

With the support of the Andrew W. Lind *Social Process in Hawai‘i* Fund, we welcome suggestions and submissions for special issues (thematic edited works, small monographs) in addition to occasional issues of a more general character. Contributions are encouraged from University faculty, graduate and undergraduate students in Sociology and other disciplines as well as other knowledgeable persons in the community. Preference will be given to research based upon sound methodologies and systematic evidence. Articles should employ a mid-level of writing and minimize technical terms. The presentation of complex statistical techniques should be kept to a minimum, and where used, should be accompanied by a clear textual description of the technique and its results.

Manuscripts are evaluated by the editors and other referees. Editors may occasionally solicit manuscripts, but in general most selections will be from among unsolicited manuscripts.

Authors interested in submitting manuscripts for consideration should send three copies to SOCIAL PROCESS IN HAWAI‘I, Department of Sociology, Saunders Hall 247, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, Honolulu, HI 96822. The following guidelines should be observed in preparation of the manuscript:

1. Due to space limitations, short articles are preferred. Manuscripts should not exceed 15 double-spaced pages. Photographs, charts and graphs are welcome.

2. Preparation of copy and the format for references should follow the guidelines of the AMERICAN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW. In case of unusual problems, consult the Editor.

3. Manuscripts submitted to the journal should be of final draft quality; the editor reserves the right to make minor editorial changes.

4. The University of Hawai‘i guidelines for allocating credit for research and writing should be observed.
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Original cover painting by Yoshiko Okamura