Local Color: Configurations of Multiculturalism and Mixed-Race Identity in Hawai‘i Literature

by

Maya Kanani Stevens
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This thesis is for my grandmother, Miriam Keiko Stevens, whose initials I share. Thank you for making me the person I am today.
Introduction

I began this project in its most concrete form in the spring of 2016, but this topic has been a part of my personal life for many years. I was born in Honolulu to a local haole mother and a mixed-race father. I grappled with my racial identity from a young age, after my first realization that my mixedness was not immediately legible to other people. I remember doing my first family history project in grade school at Aikahi Elementary, seeing the surprised faces of my classmates when they learned that I was part-Japanese by ancestry for the first time.

Yet my experience as a mixed-race subject cannot be translated onto a continental American framework. Coming to political and racial consciousness in Hawai‘i meant that its distinct history is a foundation of my consciousness. Yet its history confused me for many years. I grew up ashamed of my physical whiteness and confused by mixedness after I realized in my early teens that I would not exist without U.S. imperialism. My Japanese great-grandparents immigrated to Hawai‘i as a plantation hand and his picture bride in the early 1900s. My white grandparents moved there from California in the 1950s after my grandfather’s stint in the U.S. Navy; I remember my grandmother telling me that she was looking for adventure. The inequity in my own family history was clear, and these histories tore me in two.
But for the most part, my mixedness had already been normalized in Hawai‘i, long before I ever existed. My identity was already commonplace.

When I came to Wesleyan in 2013, I learned what little space continental mixed race studies in the U.S. had left for me, and for Hawai‘i. I began to immerse myself in critical mixed race studies in 2015, but was troubled and confused by what I found. Mixed race activists in the 1990s and early 2000s not only glossed over the troubling fetishization of hapa bodies and identities in Hawai‘i, but also ignored the existence of Hawai‘i in general. Despite its long history of interracial interaction, Hawai‘i seems to remain a footnote in American mixed race studies, and its relegation to footnotes has contributed to its furthered oversimplification and devolvement into myth in the American imaginary.¹ My research proved to me that Hawai‘i’s outsider status, due to both its geographical separation from the American continent and its majority nonwhite population, has caused its exclusion from the American imaginary as nearly anything other than a mixed-race and multicultural paradise.

Within the past ten years, this public conception has begun to change. More Americans are becoming aware of the Native Hawaiian sovereignty movement, the harms of exotifying Hawai‘i’s multiculturalism, and the complexities of Hawai‘i’s

¹ Anthologies published at the turn of the century, such as Maria P.P. Root’s *Racially Mixed People in America* and Teresa Williams-León and Cynthia L. Nakashima’s *The Sum of Our Parts: Mixed-Heritage Asian Americans*, contained perhaps one essay each analyzing the conception of racial identity in Hawai‘i, with the occasional reference to hapa identities in other parts of the anthology. Other compilations, like Maria P.P. Root’s 1996 collection *The Multiracial Experience: Racial Borders As the New Frontier*, co-opted the word “hapa” without even attempting to analyze the racial dynamics of the islands and indigenous culture from which the word was stolen. Likewise, many of the sources I was able to find were over 10 years old, thus containing no mention of recent developments about Native Hawaiian self-determination, changes in demographics in the 21st century, and cultural shifts in the age of sovereignty.
history. This is largely due to the work of Native Hawaiian historians who are rewriting colonial history, looking at historical documents in the Hawaiian language left untouched by white historians throughout the twentieth century. The study of Hawai‘i’s literature, however, has not made the same kinds of strides to undo these mythic conceptions of a nation and its people.

In the past two decades, people with mixed ancestral backgrounds and the notion of a multiracial America have come to the forefront of ethnic studies. However, although a large mixed-race population had existed in the state of Hawai‘i for centuries before multiracial activism in the U.S., it has been commonly ignored or drastically oversimplified in the developing field of mixed race studies. Hawai‘i has been predominantly nonwhite and notably mixed-race for centuries, but this history of immigration is rife with the traumas of colonialism, violence, and racism. Mixed-race identity in Hawai‘i has thus taken on a set of implications and stereotypes that differs drastically from continental American narratives of mixed ancestry, which originated from the twentieth-century passing narrative and tragic mulatto stereotype. Despite that this history has articulated certain racial hierarchies and created a historically-bound and complicated conception of race and ethnicity in the islands, white Americans became fascinated by Hawai‘i’s demographics and began to portray the islands as a harmonious racial utopia starting in the early twentieth century. Even today, most American analysis of Hawai‘i’s interracialism is vastly oversimplified, ignoring how certain stereotypes were created and reinscribed in Americanist cultural

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2 Data from the year 2000, cited by Laura Desfor Edles, shows that Hawai‘i is home to the highest percentage of people who self-identify as multiracial on the U.S. Census.
and literary studies. Hawai‘i’s stories simply cannot be forced into this literary history—they must be examined on their own terms.

**Historical Overview**

Some background on Hawai‘i’s history of immigration and occupation is necessary in order to understand the literary developments of the late twentieth century. Over the course of a mere two centuries, Hawai‘i experienced several rapid demographic transformations as a result of a unique, complicated history of immigration and settlement. This history, founded on imperialism and racism, has laid the groundwork for a unique interracial culture in the islands, facilitating not only the proliferation of interracial marriage and mixed-race children but also engendering numerous interracial tensions. As these tensions have been solidified, explored, and reinscribed in Hawai‘i’s literature, a basic understanding of the historical events that led to these attitudes and stereotypes is key.

The first Native Hawaiians migrated from Polynesia around 450 CE. After centuries of governance by local ali‘i (chiefs), one of these ali‘i nui, Kamehameha I, united the seven major islands as the Kingdom of Hawai‘i. This unified Hawaiian nation was a multicultural society nearly from its inception, with many Americans

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3 I have included a timeline of Hawaiian history starting in the late 1700s as an appendix to this thesis. All information, here and in the appendix, on the history of Hawai‘i has been compiled from works by Laura Desfor Edles, Moon-Kie Jung, Jonathan Osorio, John Chock Rosa, Judy Rohrer, Noenoe K. Silva, and personal knowledge.

4 Kamehameha I first united Hawai‘i, Maui, O‘ahu, Moloka‘i, and Lāna‘i in 1795 after years of warfare. In 1810, Ni‘ihau and Kaua‘i joined the Kingdom voluntarily. The eighth of what are today considered the major Hawaiian islands, Kaho‘olawe, was hardly populated at the time of Hawaiian unification and thus had no ruling ali‘i, but was still part of the kingdom.
and Europeans living there by the mid-nineteenth century.⁵ In the 1820s, Native Hawaiians were met by a large wave of Christian missionaries from the American northeast who, despite their white saviorism, gained notable economic and political status in the years after their arrival.

Several Hawaiian kings, most notably King Kalākaua, actively encouraged immigration from other nations to supplement the workforce necessary for Hawai‘i’s growing plantation economy. The first haole-owned plantation opened in Hawai‘i in 1835, and at the turn of the twentieth century, Hawai‘i experienced a massive influx of plantation workers from throughout Asia and parts of Europe. Men from China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Portugal, and elsewhere were brought in to work on sugar and pineapple plantations, creating a larger nonwhite settler population in the islands and further facilitating interracial interaction and mixture. However, this system created an economic hierarchy based on racial discrimination, paying workers differently along the lines of nationality and gender.⁶ Laura Desfor Edles clarifies:

[By] the end of the 19th century, Hawai‘i was not a ‘multiracial melting pot’ but a multiethnic caste society in which haoles and a few upper-status Native Hawaiians and hapas lived the good life, Portuguese became plantation supervisors [because of their phenotypical whiteness], Chinese and Japanese became plantation laborers, and lower-status Native Hawaiians tried to eke out an existence through traditional subsistence agriculture or as unskilled workers in the towns (Merry, 1998).⁷

It was amidst this environment of growing racial stratification and white-dominated capitalist practices that prominent white plantation owners organized the illegal

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⁵ “By 1848 there were between 1,300 and 1,500 foreigners living in Hawai‘i, in comparison to some 100,000 Native Hawaiians” (Edles, 232).
⁶ Edles, 233.
⁷ Edles, 233.
overthrow of Queen Liliʻuokalani in 1893 aided by members of the U.S. military.⁸ After the coup’s success, the usurpers bombarded the United States with requests to annex Hawaiʻi, in no small part to lessen the effects of the McKinley tariff (1890), which had increased U.S. duties on imported goods. Native Hawaiians were largely opposed to annexation, sending a series of petitions to the government in 1897,⁹ but the U.S. Congress voted to annex Hawaiʻi in 1898 in spite of these protestations.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Hawaiʻi was then an incorporated territory of the United States. This allowed for more U.S. citizens from the continent to settle there, often to capitalize on business interests or to be stationed at one of the several U.S. military bases throughout the archipelago. Racial tensions festered throughout the prewar period as labor organizers fought against racist plantation management tactics, and further conflict erupted in 1941 with the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor.¹⁰ After World War II, Hawaiʻi was embroiled in a decades-long debate about its inclusion into the American union, which culminated in Hawaiʻi’s legal recognition as the 50th state in August 1959.

Interracial interactions in Hawaiʻi have thus been colored by a long history of discrimination, imperialism, and economic competition since the genesis of the Kingdom of Hawaiʻi. White hegemony over the sugar and pineapple industries, the bitter aftereffects of the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian government and its

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⁸ The provisional government, which called itself the “Republic of Hawaiʻi,” also banned the Hawaiian language in schools in 1896. The ban was only lifted in 1978, when Hawaiian was designated an official language along with English.
⁹ These are referred to as the Kūʻē petitions. “Kūʻē” is a Hawaiian verb which translates to “to protest” or “to oppose.” See glossary.
¹⁰ Immediately after the attack, the U.S. government instituted martial law throughout the territory, imposing strict curfews and strengthening pre-existing anti-Japanese and anti-“other” sentiments within the powerful white elite. It was lifted in October 1944.
subsequent annexation, and a domineering American military presence throughout the islands over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have created considerable anti-white and anti-American resentment among many nonwhite persons in Hawai‘i. This is true especially among Native Hawaiians, who are still fighting today for the right to political self-determination. In their struggle for the return of Hawaiians’ political independence, Kānaka Maoli stress the distinction between “indigenous” people and Hawai‘i’s self-proclaimed “locals,” who have roots in the islands but are ultimately settlers in the land that rightfully belongs to the Native Hawaiian lāhui. Likewise, plantation owners’ “divide-and-rule” policy, which ultimately separated and segregated different racial groups among plantation workers, as well as fierce economic competition between these racial groups, created unique tensions and racial prejudices between Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, and Filipino people in Hawai‘i that persist still today.

Creating Hawai‘i as a Multicultural Utopia

Despite these apparent racial tensions, reductive stereotypes of Hawai‘i as a harmonious multiracial paradise emerged as early as the nineteenth century, and this

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11 For more on Hawaiian sovereignty, see Haunani-Kay Trask’s “Settlers of Color and ‘Immigrant’ Hegemony: ‘Locals’ in Hawai‘i.”
12 Edles elucidates that “the term ‘local’ has emerged to refer to people who are born and raised in Hawai‘i who are of Hawai‘i but not necessarily descendants of the original aboriginal peoples. However, given the extraordinarily raced, colonial history of Hawai‘i, it should come as no surprise that the term ‘local’ is not only about ‘place of origin’ but that it also has significant ‘race’ and ‘class’ connotations. Historically, the term ‘local’ has meant ‘working class people of color in Hawai‘i,’ particularly those with ‘plantation’ backgrounds as opposed to haole elites” (235).
dominant narrative has been reiterated in and revived through both early 1900s sociological studies of the racial dynamics of the state and the utopic language of multiculturalism at the turn of the 21st century. As more American settlers gained economic and political prominence in the islands throughout the early 1800s, the American portrayal of Hawai‘i as a friendly, utopic paradise proved to be economically beneficial for those who wished to attract more American business and capital to the island chain. This view was codified into the fabric of the American popular imaginary in the early 1900s, when several American sociologists began to research Hawai‘i’s unique racial makeup. Sociologist Romanzo Adams first used the phrase “racial melting pot” in 1926, and throughout the 1920s and 1930s Hawai‘i was continually put on a pedestal by white Americans searching for a unified multiracial future, ultimately erasing its complex interracial history. Studies like that of the Chicago School of Sociology, which called Hawai‘i a “racial laboratory” because of its unique cultural makeup, ultimately reinforced a sense of white American nationalism, reaffirming western business interests in Asia and the Pacific.

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15 Judy Rohrer, Haoles in Hawai‘i, 63 (cites Jonathan Okamura 1998, 267).
16 Rosa, 50.
17 Citing popular American mythologies and self-conceptions, John Chock Rosa writes, “To a great extent, the paradisal myth of Hawai‘i that emerged was a derivative of several myths that were already a part of American thought. In one sense, the idea of Hawai‘i as a physical paradise corresponded rather directly with the European discovery of America and the subsequent perception of the new continent as a ‘Zion in the wilderness,’ an ideal setting for a utopian social world. In a similar sense, the view of Hawai‘i as a social paradise echoed an earlier view of America as a land free from European prejudices, where people of almost all backgrounds could live together in harmony (Hooper, 1980: 185-186)” (50).
Thus, the most widely accepted American view of Hawaiʻi in the period before World War II was the consequence of a largely touristic, voyeuristic economic and political agenda. Hawaiʻi was seen as the U.S.’s gateway to Asia because of its location between the two continents, and this viewpoint was used to justify both American annexation and increased military presence in the islands. In addition, this image of utopia has been used for decades to attract tourists to Hawaiʻi, both as an incorporated territory and as a state, and tourism remains one of the largest sources of revenue in Hawaiʻi. The Hawaiʻi Visitors Bureau has used this narrative to the state’s fiduciary advantage, furthering the lucrative image of an idyllic paradise which Haunani-Kay Trask identifies as the prostitution of Hawaiian culture.

**Contemporary Multiculturalism**

The language of modern American multiculturalism reiterates many of the problematic misconceptions of interracialism, both sociological and literary, put forth about Hawaiʻi in the early twentieth century by white Americans. The ways in which contemporary mixed-race discourse often essentialize race, reestablish monoracial categories, and objectify mixed-race bodies and individuals were some of my primary motivations to explore the literary origins of the myth of Hawaiʻi’s utopic multiculturalism in this thesis.

In the wake of 1990s multiculturalism, U.S. narratives of mixed ancestry in the 21st century are often framed as an embrace of globalization, global capitalism,

18 Rosa, 51.
and commodified pluralism. The mixed race individual is stripped of subjecthood and made into an object to be advertised, sold, and controlled. As our world becomes increasingly more interconnected, a kind of ‘cultural blending’ can more easily take place, but the neoliberal rhetoric associated with globalization too often serves the exclusive purpose of cementing nationalism and ethnic belonging. Yoon Sun Lee suggests that the modern emphasis on cultural pluralism inadvertently reinscribes racial difference, as she says that “by appearing to accept and even embrace difference, pluralism can in fact make difference insurmountable in the public sphere.”

**Thesis Outline**

This thesis is organized chronologically over the course of three chapters, starting in the early days of Hawai‘i’s statehood and ending in the current decade. Chapter One explores James Michener’s *Hawaii*, published in 1959 in concurrence with Hawai‘i’s statehood, as one of the foundational literary texts of the melting pot myth. The novel itself offers a fictionalized history that erases Native Hawaiians and gives Hawai‘i’s multiracialism primordial origins. Michener’s employment of mixed-race people – the “Golden Man” – as the embodiment of the synthesis of “eastern” and “western” values serves the ultimate goal of promoting American capitalism and imperialism.

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20 Yoon Sun Lee, *Modern Minority: Asian American Literature and Everyday Life*, 138-139. Lee’s analysis of modern multiculturalism maps well onto the mixed race movement in the continental U.S., as Susan Koshy writes in “Morphing Race into Ethnicity” – “the ethos of liberal pluralism that underwrites U.S. versions of multiculturalism encourages the maintenance of ethnic identity” (Koshy, 189).
Chapter Two moves into the late twentieth century with an examination of the early Local literary movement in Hawai‘i. Hawai‘i writers began to write against the fact that Hawai‘i literature had been dominated by non-local white American men for most of the twentieth century. Although the Local movement made significant strides in countering imperialist modes of cultural production, it was criticized in the 1990s for being neocolonialist, favoring the works and opinions of middle-class Asians over those more marginalized ethnic groups, like Filipinos and Native Hawaiians, and additionally casting these groups in an overwhelmingly negative caricature. I will focus my literary analysis on local writer Lois-Ann Yamanaka, as the controversy surrounding her work is exemplary of the time in which she was writing.

Chapter Three will attempt to bring the first two chapters into the 21st century with a discussion of modern Hawai‘i literature. I will examine Tyler Miranda’s ‘Ewa Which Way (2013) and Kaui Hart Hemmings’s Juniors (2015) as examples of the temporal and stylistic tensions that persist within the body of Hawai‘i’s literature in the wake of 1990s criticism. While Miranda’s novel is, formally speaking, an incredibly typical 1990s novel, it ultimately participates in the same kinds of neocolonialist stereotyping that the genre has already been criticized for. On the other hand, Hemmings’s novel reads far more like Michener’s text, using the rhetoric of multiculturalism (now updated for the 21st century) to give the narrative more “authentic” value. I argue that each text is equally problematic, perpetuating stereotypes that have existed since the mid-century.
Author’s Note: Language and Orthography

Throughout this thesis, although I will quote Hawaiian words as they are written in any given text, I will write Hawaiian names and words with their appropriate diacritical markings as they appear in the Pukui-Elderts Hawaiian dictionary. The ‘okina, which looks like a backwards apostrophe, signals a glottal stop, while the kahakō indicates the elongation of a vowel. While most American style formats exclude most or all diacritical markings, I will spell Hawai‘i consistently with its ‘okina in its possessive (“Hawai‘i’s”) and non-possessive forms. However, anglicized forms of Hawaiian words—namely, “Hawaiian”—generally will not include these marks. I will also not italicize Hawaiian words, as they are not foreign to the people and culture of Hawai‘i. I will provide brief glosses in my footnotes of lesser-known Hawaiian words upon their first appearance, but not afterwards. Full definitions can be found in the glossary on pages 102-104.

Furthermore, the word “Hawaiian” refers exclusively to indigenous Native Hawaiians. To call other residents of Hawai‘i “Hawaiian,” although they may be longtime locals, erases Native Hawaiian culture and personhood. They will be referred to as “of Hawai‘i,” or as a “Hawai‘i writer.” In addition, the word “local” is capitalized when referring specifically to the “Local literary tradition,” and not capitalized when referring to, for example, a local person or a local custom.
Chapter One: James Michener’s *Hawaii* and the Postwar American Imaginary

Published in 1959, James A. Michener’s epic historical novel *Hawaii* played a significant role in shaping the way white Americans viewed Hawai‘i, both in terms of its people and their racial makeup and in terms of its broader part in the U.S.’s effort to establish itself as a postcolonial, postracial global power after World War II. Michener’s novel, in conjunction with various articles, movies, and newsreels published throughout the 1950s and 1960s, sought to make Hawai‘i more accessible and more palatable to American readers in line with a long tradition of postwar travel writing during a period of growing U.S. tourism and exploration in Asia and the Pacific.

Over 900 pages long, *Hawaii* follows thousands of years of Hawai‘i’s history over the course of six distinct chapters and historical moments. The first chapter, “From the Boundless Deep,” details the geological formation of the Hawaiian Islands millions of years ago, both personifying and sexualizing the uninhabited islands in order to establish Hawai‘i as a unique breeding ground for new types of plants, animals, and ultimately people. Chapter II, “From the Sun-Swept Lagoon,” narrates the first encounters of Native Hawaiian people with white outsiders (illogically not set in Hawai‘i, but Bora Bora). Chapters III-V – “From the Farm of Bitterness,”
“From the Starving Village,” and “From the Inland Sea” – detail, respectively, the immigration of a group of white Christian missionaries in the 1800s, white sugar plantation owners’ importation of Chinese laborers in the late 1800s, and their subsequent importation of Japanese laborers in the early 1990s effectively to replace the Chinese laborers they now saw as lazy and ineffective. After each of these three chapters introduces a specific family, the final chapter, “The Golden Men,” brings all three lineages together during what the novel presents as the most pivotal moment of Hawaiʻi’s history up to that point: the territorial legislative elections of 1954 and the moments immediately before Hawaiʻi became a state.

While Michener’s stance on the novel’s allegorical accuracy remains ambiguous, the final moments of Chapter VI closely mirror the events leading up to what many call Hawaiʻi’s Democratic Revolution of 1954.1 The novel was published in November of 1959, merely three months after a plebiscite vote in the islands confirmed its status as the 50th state and after over a decade of legislative debates and heated discussions about whether or not this annexed territory of the U.S. would be more formally incorporated into the union. Michener himself was living in the islands at this time in order to write Hawaii, and became a staunch advocate for Hawaiʻi’s statehood to the rest of America; his essays and articles had considerably swayed American popular opinion due to his already-extant status as a prominent best-selling and Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist.2

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1 That year, the territorial legislature shifted from a Republican to a Democratic majority, additionally electing the territory’s first Japanese-American representative, Daniel K. Inouye, who is represented in the novel by Shigeo Sakagawa.
2 Michener’s 1947 novel Tales of the South Pacific, which was later adapted into the popular musical by Rodgers and Hammerstein, won him the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1948. By the
The majority of American-born postcolonial scholars analyze Hawai‘i either knowingly or unknowingly from within the viewpoint that it exists—and, to a certain extent, has always existed—as an inherent part of the United States. In order to fully understand the role that Michener’s *Hawaii*, a self-described historical novel, has had in shaping mainland American consciousness of the island chain and its people, it is important first to understand the annexed territory’s place in the postwar period in conjunction with Michener’s own personal politics. While the novel purports to present a “true” version of history, its representations of then-current events and its allegorizing of the distant and recent past in Hawai‘i serves the primary goal of presenting Hawai‘i in as favorable a light as possible to a mainland American audience ripe with a desire to explore and consume it as an exotic novelty.

As Michener wrote from his personal perspective as an American outsider to the islands, hoping that U.S. power would expand into Asia and the Pacific, much of the critical analysis of his work and of *Hawaii* in particular subsequently falls into the trap of echoing his Americanist logic. It is true that after centuries of its heavy-handed intervention, racist American imperialism has burned its mark on the land, bodies, and histories of Hawai‘i and the Hawaiian people. Yet while Hawai‘i’s history can no longer be separated from the American imperialism that overthrew the Kingdom of Hawai‘i and disenfranchised, excluded, and continues to dispossess time *Hawaii* was published, Michener’s other novels had already sold millions of copies and had been translated into several different languages, solidifying his authorial clout. This is indicative of a larger trend in Americanist studies as well. Because of its unique history and near-outlier status in discussions of multiculturalism, and indeed because of its refusal to fit into a tidy narrative of American history or into any preexisting category, Hawai‘i is often glossed over, mentioned only briefly, or elided altogether as continental postcolonial scholars craft their arguments about multiracialism and racial liberalism.
Kānaka Maoli, examining Hawai‘i’s history on its own terms offers a harsher criticism of this novel than many Americanist scholars have previously given. James Michener’s historical project is insidiously revisionist, as *Hawaii* slyly excludes many of the more troubling moments of Hawai‘i’s history, reducing the shock and impact of the ways in which Hawai‘i entered into American consciousness and downplaying Michener’s own role in creating the image of Hawai‘i’s racial and democratic idyll. This neoliberalist framework, within the novel and in subsequent analyses of it, is not only detrimental to understanding the historical evasiveness of Michener’s novel but also reductive and racist, ignoring that Hawai‘i was a sovereign kingdom long before the first Americans ever set foot in the islands. This denial legitimizes the novel’s portrayal of Hawai‘i as ripe and eager for admission into the American union.

**Michener’s Hawai‘i and Postwar American Neoliberalism**

Despite the racism of Hawai‘i’s white elite, the inequalities created and proliferated by imperialism and white economic hegemony, and the injustices of the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i by U.S.-affiliated business owners with support from the U.S. military in 1893, most Americans gloss over the racist foundations of Hawai‘i’s entrance into American consciousness. Hawai‘i’s status as an annexed U.S. territory throughout the first half of the twentieth century allowed for the U.S. government to capitalize on its global imperial power in the islands despite an officially antiracist, racially liberal stance. Hawai‘i was seen by many U.S.

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4 According to Jodi Melamed, these sorts of “official antiracisms” allowed for the conception of a modernity “articulated under conditions of U.S. global ascendancy [...] that revises, partners with, and exceeds the capacities of white supremacy without replacing or ending it” (*Represent and Destroy*, pp. 4-7). She continues: “At the onset of the crises of the racial break
government officials at the time as a place ripe for exploitation and utilization, and as global conflicts became more encoded by racial tensions, the U.S. sought to portray itself as racially inclusive and tolerant in order to take full advantage of all potential resources available.

After WWII, the sense of an American ‘victory’ combined with the effects of various economic, technological, and psychological changes in the American citizenry led to the vast growth of the international tourism industry. An increase in expendable income per capita, the advancement of air travel, and a “renewed desire to see the world” inspired Americans to travel more frequently, increasingly more to parts of Asia that had become ‘open’ to American tourists after the war.⁵ Government officials’ opinions and other media from the 1950s redefined the American tourist as a personal ambassador and diplomat to parts of Asia, primarily to represent American wealth and power abroad without any involvement from the government. The tourist thus became “an emblem of America’s benign, non-imperial internationalism.”⁶ Christina Klein explains that U.S. government officials and intellectuals alike “aimed to produce a specifically sentimental tourist who would forge bonds with people around the world by engaging in meaningful exchanges, while at the same time avoiding displays of wealth, power, or racism that could render America’s power visible in unattractive ways.”⁷ The American tourist, now responsible for promoting

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[after WWII], as global conflicts came to be coded in terms of race and it became imperative for U.S. leadership to demonstrate a movement toward greater equality, the networks of racial liberalism were well positioned to nationalize, to absorb new ideological content, and to develop new capacities to administrate emerging racial orders” (19). See Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism.

⁵ Christina Klein, Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, p. 104.
⁶ Klein, 109.
⁷ Klein, 109.
inclusion and tolerance abroad, was thus used as a propagandist tool by the U.S. government after WWII.

Postwar travel writing played an immense part in making Asia palatable to the new American tourist, not only to encourage people to travel to these exotic new countries, but also to validate the very foundations of U.S. expansionism through tourism. As Klein explains, “Racial tolerance became an integral component of the global subjectivity that travel writers sought to cultivate in Americans.”

Travel writers themselves were often among the earliest waves of tourists to countries in which the U.S. either openly or privately hope to establish an economically beneficial relationship. These writers’ representations of Asian and Pacific regions and their people were perceived as the first accounts of ‘true’ life there after WWII, creating an image of Asia and the Pacific that could and would be easily subdued by the power of U.S. expansionism. Subsequently, travel writing had a direct impact on the ways in which postwar tourists conducted themselves abroad, as they were often encouraged to admit to racial strife at home but insist adamantly that progress was being made to ameliorate it.

Using the postwar tourist as pawns in a global system of manipulation in conjunction with travel writing’s sensationalist depictions of the Asia-Pacific region, the U.S. government found a hands-off way to assure other countries that its domestic affairs were under control and, more fundamentally, that the United States

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8 Klein, 112.
9 Klein writes: “The tourist thus became an integral part of the state apparatus for managing the overseas perception of domestic American race relations: encouraging Americans to be racially tolerant while abroad was far easier, and more politically palatable, than enacting substantive civil rights legislation at home” (113).
was in fact not racist—even “antiracist”—serving the goal of gaining monolithic power, prestige, and influence in the postwar global arena.

While several of Michener’s works were billed primarily as long works of historical fiction, they fell within the growing genre of exploratory travel writing. Michener himself was emblematic of this new postwar tourist, as he lived and worked throughout the South Pacific, Korea, and other parts of Asia in addition to Hawai‘i, adapting his personal experiences both as a U.S. naval officer and as a civilian into epic novels with much critical success. After enlisting in the U.S. Navy in 1943 and again after WWII, he expanded his role as a naval historian in the 1950s to include his travel writing. Michener’s military status not only gave him the ability to travel throughout these regions but also linked him directly to the legacy of military expansionism. Considering his active participation in and concurrent support of U.S. military power, the heavily expansionist undercurrent of Hawaii is no surprise.

Like many other travel writers during this time, Michener saw his writing as a service to the American public. Using his work to inspire support for expansionist ideologies, he “exemplified the postwar synthesis of left and right internationalist visions of America’s proper role in the world.”

This synthesis manifested itself in an advocacy for a growing partnership between ‘East’ and ‘West’ along with a belief in its inevitability. Michener’s writing supported the idea that “As a democratic nation of immigrants, [...] America alone possessed the ideals and the experiences to lead a multiracial world of independent nations in which imperialism had lost all legitimacy.

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10 e.g. Tales of the South Pacific (1947), Return to Paradise (1950), The Bridges at Toko-Ri (1953), Sayonara (1954), and eventually Hawaii.
11 Klein, 119.
12 Klein, 124.
Only America contained the principle of internationalism within its own borders.”13

In this way, Michener used his work to translate a political ideology into a more palatable mode of cultural production.

Michener’s decision to write a historical novel about the Territory of Hawai‘i falls neatly in line with his personal politics and authorial goals. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 and after subsequent increases in American military power in the islands throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Hawai‘i had become more visible and accessible to white Americans. In 1945, both mainland and island residents and politicians began a concrete push for Hawai‘i’s incorporation into the United States.14 Michener was among the cohort of pro-statehood voices, as he wrote prolifically about the merits of incorporation in the 1940s and 1950s. In several articles, he represents Hawai‘i’s Asian and mixed-race residents as racial peacemakers, as Klein writes, “Part of the value of Hawaii’s statehood, then, becomes its ability to smooth over the racial divisions within the nation by interjecting Asian Americans as a third term between the poles of black and white.”15

The statehood movement thrust Hawai‘i’s nonwhite population into the American spotlight,16 and Hawai‘i’s so-called successful multiracialism became

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13 Klein, 224.
14 While various government officials in Hawai‘i introduced bills proposing statehood in the territorial legislature as early as 1919 (by Prince Jonah Kuhiokalani), most of them were shot down almost immediately. The bill that ended up becoming law, signed by President Eisenhower in 1959, was introduced in the territorial legislature in that same year.
15 Klein, 250.
16 Published in Life in 1945, “Hawaii, A Melting Pot, a Score of Races Live Together in Amity” asserted that Hawai‘i was “the world’s most successful experiment in mixed breeding, a sociologist’s dream of interracial cultures” (cited in Klein, 249), echoing various American sociological studies conducted in the islands in the 1920s and 1930s.
evidence of a unique sense of togetherness that made Hawai‘i inherently American.¹⁷ Hawai‘i’s territorial representatives regurgitated the language of mythic multiculturalism, calling the islands “living proof that democracy as advocated by the United States affords a solution to some of the problems plaguing the world”¹⁸ and “the furnace that is melting that melting pot.”¹⁹ To pro-statehood proponents, racial harmony became something that Hawai‘i could somehow give to the rest of the United States.²⁰ Yet far less is said about the portion of Hawai‘i’s population who opposed statehood because of its near-certain consequence of increasing foreign (i.e. American) white hegemony in the islands.²¹ Looking at the numbers from the 1959 plebiscite vote, it is difficult to find an official record of strong, organized resistance

¹⁷ Interestingly, the 1931-1932 Massie Case is similarly cited by local Hawai‘i scholars as a historical moment that created a distinct “local” identity in Hawai‘i, distinguishing Kānaka Maoli, kama‘aina people of color, and other malihini residents from white haoles from the continental U.S. For more, see historical timeline.


²⁰ The fight for statehood was not quiet or peaceful, as it dragged on for nearly fifteen years because of continental Americans’ conflicting ideas of what Hawai‘i did and could potentially represent in conjunction with the United States. The opposition most frequently cited in American history books and analyses, and likewise most readily available in public record, is that of Southern white Democrats who essentially viewed Hawai‘i’s nonwhite population as a threat to white supremacy in the midst of America’s turbulent civil rights movement. Other statehood opponents included Cold War anticommunist groups, who saw Hawai‘i’s recent labor unionization efforts among plantation workers as primarily a Communist movement. (See Klein, 246-248.)

²¹ This is partly because no official (English-language) record exists of both nonnative residents’ and Kānaka Maoli fears of disenfranchisement. Hawai‘i’s economy and a large part of its government were already dominated by the Big Five and rife with corruption. Their economic power and prowess stemmed directly and unequivocally from U.S. intervention in the sugar industry, particularly at the time of the overthrow in 1893. Incorporation into the American union would further disenfranchise plantation workers who had already struggled in the years prior against plantation-owner hegemony to create labor unions and secure the basic rights that had been previously denied to them.

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to statehood. This is in part due to the pervasive hegemony of the Big Five—the five largest, all white-owned plantation companies in Hawai‘i—whose power for intimidation extended far beyond the official channels of government. These views may indeed (I would venture, almost certainly) exist in Hawaiian language newspapers from the 1940s and 1950s, where expressions of anti-authoritarian opinions were more widely accepted, but I do not speak ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i, and translations of these newspapers and their editorials are not readily available.

**Elisions of Hawaiian History: Configuring the White Elite**

In its semi-fictionalized history and winding narratives of assimilation, *Hawaii* exists primarily as a treatise advocating for the territory’s incorporation into the American union through statehood. Many of Michener’s white American readers took his sequence of historical events as fact when the novel was published in 1959, but Michener created in *Hawaii* a device of insidious historical erasure, actively choosing and working tirelessly to present Hawai‘i as a burgeoning racial utopia and a site of declining white power, excising a long-standing history of colonialism and racial strife. The novel’s failure exists on two levels: firstly, its utopic representation of Hawai‘i’s history promotes a more cohesive agenda of statehood, and secondly, it fails to acknowledge that the novel’s plentiful depictions of racism undermine its final message that Hawai‘i is a symbol of future racial harmony in the U.S.

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22 The Big Five were Castle & Cooke, Alexander & Baldwin, C. Brewer & Co., American Factors (Amfac), and Theo H. Davies & Co.
23 While Native Hawaiian scholars and historians like Noenoe K. Silva (*Aloha Betrayed*) and Jonathan Kamakawiwoʻole Osorio (*Dismembering Lāhui*) have worked directly with many of these documents, their research focuses primarily on Native Hawaiian resistance to U.S. annexation of the islands in the late 1800s.
Although Michener claims authorial immunity from being held to a ‘true’ account of Hawai‘i’s history and insists that the novel is a work of fiction, *Hawaii* does claim historical fidelity despite that the history it offers is incomplete. The epigraph insists that the novel is “true to the spirit and history of Hawaii” but that most people, things, and events in the novel are “imaginary.” However, many of the novel’s characters can be lined up with real figures in Hawai‘i’s past, missionaries and politicians alike.24 Likewise, Michener does not shy away from exposing the blatant racism of the members of The Fort, which exists in the novel as a stand-in for Hawai‘i’s Big Five. The Fort’s leaders are all descended from the first group of Calvinist missionaries that Michener introduces in Chapter III. These families have found it remarkably easy to impose their ways of life on the people of Hawai‘i and have worked over the course of generations to establish themselves as integral to Hawai‘i’s local society, which Michener shows throughout Chapters III-V. However, the final chapter of the novel shows them for the first time fighting to maintain their economic and political power in the midst of a changing political landscape.

Hoxworth Hale, the novel’s participant narrator, is perhaps the most perplexing and troubling example of the novel’s inability to reconcile the contradictions between its glaring examples of white racism and the notion of Hawai‘i as an emblem of America’s racially harmonious future. Chapter VI offers numerous looks into the private meetings of Fort leaders, in which they discuss various ways to maintain the economic political control they believe they deserve.

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24 For example, as a WWII veteran and the first Japanese American elected to Hawai‘i’s legislature, Shigeo Sakagawa was clearly written as a representation of the late Daniel K. Inouye.
Despite how blatantly their racism influences and begets their sense of entitlement for power, these white men claim that their interests are definitive of what the entire territory’s population truly wants, ignoring the harms done by their families’ interference with Hawaiian culture and politics and believing that their established empire gives them both ownership of the land they took from others and the right to dictate its future. As one of these leaders, Hale’s own racism is jarringly explicit. This undermines his later claim that he embodies the “golden man,” a human manifestation of burgeoning “East-West” relations between the U.S. and Asia. During a meeting in which The Fort discusses how to keep American business interests from compromising their own enterprise, Hale criticizes the company in question for trying to assert a claim in a place where they do not belong, all while paradoxically believing that he and the other members of The Fort—all descendants of nonnative immigrants whose very intention was to change Native Hawaiian culture through Christianity—deserve to be in Hawai‘i at all. He calls them “outsiders” and the proponents of “soulless absentee landlordism of the worst sort,” growling about how they would “steal our money and give us nothing in return except lower prices for a little while” (857). As he continues, Hale proves that The Fort’s power was established generations before he was ever a member, taking a moment to look out of his window at Michener’s Honolulu. He points to the various libraries, museums, and school established by the first missionaries as an omnipresent reminder of their cultural prominence and hegemonic legacy as he writes, “You could scarcely touch an aspect of Hawaii which had not been improved and nourished by some member of The Fort” (857).
While Michener attempts to convince the reader that The Fort believes fundamentally in the good of Hawai‘i, he fails to adequately prove this benevolence in spite of every other account that confirms its sense of paternalistic entitlement. Hale and his peers believe so firmly in the benefits of their meddling that they cannot see—or, simply refuse to see—how these convictions have excluded a large portion of Hawai‘i’s population. Hale even says to himself:

“Why don’t the people down there trust us to know what’s best for these islands?” he asked in some bewilderment. “You’d think they’d bear in mind all we’ve done for Hawaii. Why, they ought to rise up as one man and kick outfits like Gregory’s or California Fruit right into the ocean. But they never seem to appreciate what’s best for them.” (857-858)

Hale remains so oblivious to and in denial of its own white paternalism that he cannot bear to see another group from the mainland do almost exactly what both his forebears and his peers in The Fort’s current iteration have wrought in Hawai‘i. Although the current members were all born in Hawai‘i and have lived there for their entire lives, they nevertheless exercise a monopolistic economic power that was not present in the islands before the first Americans arrived. In line with generations of self-justified settler colonialism, they are still leveraging that power against people of color, especially those of Japanese and Native Hawaiian ancestry, on the basis of benevolent white saviorism and false generosity.

Yet somehow, even more explicit assertions of the white elite’s fear of losing power exist without criticism in the last chapter of the novel. These passages emphasize not only Hale’s obliviousness to his participation in detrimental white hegemony, but James Michener’s as well; although the author exposes how this culture came to be and illuminates how it has exploited the islands and its people, he
nevertheless offers nothing to substantiate his claims by the end of the novel that white hegemony was coming to an end, other than Hale’s personal testimony that this would be the case. Hale addresses a U.S. congressman who is visiting Hawai‘i to evaluate its viability for statehood thus:

“Here are the facts,” Hale said simply. “The white man in Hawaii is being submerged. He has some financial power left, a good deal, I suppose. He has the courts to defend him, and an appointed governor upon whom he can rely. Sir, if you change any one of those factors, Hawaii will become a toy in the hands of Japanese. They’ll control the courts and start bringing in decisions against us. They’ll upset our system of land holding. They’ll elect their own governor and send Japanese to Congress. Do you want to serve with a Jap?” (898)

This so-called honest assessment of Hawai‘i’s racial inequity speaks to his American imperialist viewpoint that power exists solely for the white man, especially in Hawai‘i. He plays on contemporary American fears of Japanese people, using the idea of a Japanese congressman to prove to Congressman Carter that white power in Hawai‘i must be actively protected by U.S. intervention.\(^{25}\)

However, one thing that both Michener and Hale himself make clear is that Hoxworth Hale is not of “pure” European ancestry.\(^{26}\) His great-great-grandmother Malama was a Native Hawaiian woman of royal lineage, which makes Hoxworth a descendant of this line by blood. Yet he outright rejects his Native Hawaiian heritage except when it becomes convenient for him. In the same conversation with Congressman Carter, Hale brings up his heritage in order to legitimize his anti-

\(^{25}\) In fact, U.S. intervention is one of the things that has preserved The Fort’s political clout for so long, as Hale cites the reliability of Hawai‘i’s territorial governors, each appointed to the office by the U.S. president.

\(^{26}\) In fact, Hale refutes the very notion that anyone’s ancestry can be pure, especially that of a “golden man” like himself.
Hawaiian racism and his staunch opposition to the restoration of a sovereign Hawaiian nation:

As you may know, I’m descended from the royal ali`i of Hawaii, and my great-great-great-grandmother was one of the noblest women I’ve ever heard of. […] But if one of those pathetic, incompetent ali`i ever tried to get back on the throne of Hawaii, I personally would take down my musket and shoot him through the head. (898)

This statement could be read simply as a bigot’s refusal of Native claims to the land and to their nation, as his explicit threat of violence solidifies just how much he believes that Native Hawaiian rule is inferior to that of the white man. But as he continues his conversation, a more pervasive facet of The Fort’s quest to maintain power becomes clear. As Hale benefits personally from The Fort’s institutionalized exploitation, Hale threatens to violently silence any form of opposition, believing that the ends—the perpetual maintenance of their power and of the status quo—will justify whatever means The Fort deems necessary. He continues:

“I’m also descended from the missionaries. And if one of them tried to come back and govern in the harsh, bigoted old way, I’d shoot him through the head, too.”

“Let me get it straight, then, what is it you want?”

“We don’t want royalty, we don’t want missionaries, and we don’t want Japanese,” Hale summarized. “We want things to go along just as they are.” (898-899).

Here, the maintenance of the status quo proves to be the crux of The Fort’s mission, necessitating that the status quo in question is one that supports and augments white hegemony in the islands. Their fear of losing these means of power seems to be their primary motivation in subduing Native Hawaiians, resisting continental business interests, and acquiring control of more land and other trusts to secure their self-positioned economic and political power. Hoxworth Hale exists in the novel primarily
as an agent of U.S. expansionism into Asia and the Pacific, portraying Hawai‘i as the
natural next step in the United States’ imperialist quest for power.

Although the final episodes of the novel seem to reject both Hale’s and The
Fort’s narrow-minded view that Hawai‘i’s white hegemony must be maintained, they
ultimately fail to offer any proof of these sentiments that is powerful enough to
override 900 pages of prejudice, greed, and racism. One of the chapter’s supposedly
major turning points, in which Hale realizes the intrinsic and previously invisible
benefits of Hawai‘i’s multicultural society, reads primarily as an attempt to gloss over
earlier instances of his own racism and prejudice. While he nominally recognizes that
Hawai‘i’s society must change as its people change, this realization comes only ten
pages after he proudly asserts that he would resort to murder to maintain his white
peers’ power in Hawai‘i. Hale’s epiphany here is written as an economic metaphor; as
he describes his personal “period of mist and fog” (906) in the wake of recent social
change, he introduces how “the great pineapple crisis of 1953 [made it look] as if
Hawaii itself were crumbling” (906). At this moment, the inexplicable deaths of
pineapple plants across the state dealt a massive blow to one of Hawai‘i’s biggest
industries. Hoxworth Hale, as the leader of one of the largest pineapple corporations
in the novel, works tirelessly with a hired team of scientists to figure out the cause of
these crop failures. Eventually, they discover the culprit to be the absence of zinc in
the soil after years of its gradual depletion. Hale expresses incredulity, since no one
had ever heard of adding zinc, “whose presence to begin with no one was aware of”
(907). He seems to express his gratitude for the small, unseen minerals in the soil,
which, despite a relatively unassuming presence, now decided whether these
pineapple plants—and as a result, Hawai‘i’s entire economy—would live or die.

Positioning himself as both recipient and protector of Hawai‘i’s wealth, Hale sees these people’s value only because of how they could directly benefit him or The Fort as a whole. Using economic language and exposing his exploitative tendencies, he tells the scientists working on the problem,

We are going to consider our famous red soil of Hawaii as a bank. From it we draw enormous supplies of things like calcium and nitrate and iron, and those are easy to replace. But we also seem to draw constant if minute supplies of things like zinc, and we haven’t been putting them back. […] This marvelous soil is our bank. Never again will we overdraw our account. (908)

Although he now believes that even the smallest parts of Hawai‘i’s society must have a value he previously overlooked, he only perceives this value based on how it can benefit him. Extending his expression of gratitude for all the things that go unnoticed in his daily life, Hale concludes this section of the chapter by comparing these pineapple fields to Hawai‘i’s society as a whole:

[Hale] suddenly had a vision of Hawaii as a great pineapple field: no man could say out of hand what contribution the Filipino or the Korean or the Norwegian had made, but if anyone stole from Hawaii those things which the tiniest component added to the society, perhaps the human pineapples would begin to perish, too. For a long time Hale stood at the edge of his fields, contemplating this new concept, and after that he viewed people like Filipinos and Portuguese in an entirely different light. “What vital thing do they add that keeps our society healthy?” he often wondered. (908)

Here, Hale equates Hawai‘i’s people of color to the trace minerals in the soil of his pineapple fields, and Hawai‘i’s society—specifically, a society that perpetuates white hegemony—to the pineapple itself. Despite his self-professed change of heart, Hale’s ideological framework for thinking about Hawai‘i’s society is exceptionally narrow, as he configures people of color literally as dirt, while the pineapple—the fruit of exploitation—stands in only for those with economic and racial privilege, like Hale
himself. While he does finally, after hundreds of pages, acknowledge the value of the ethnic communities that he, his peers, and his predecessors have exploited for generations, he tries to look at them from outside of this context. This very act of trying to separate local people of color from the systems of discrimination that dictated their social status for so many years is another facet of Hale’s attempt to distance himself from the racism he both describes and participates in. Hale’s economic language makes it difficult to believe that this change of heart is motivated by anything other than his personal and collective quest to maintain The Fort’s death grip on Hawai‘i’s society, culture, and economy. This section of the chapter ultimately ends with Hale’s rhetorical question, and the novel does not provide a concrete answer to what “vital thing” people of color provide in Hawai‘i’s society.

The novel’s final, somewhat desperate attempt to distance both Hale and Michener from the racism they describe and embody comes in the surprise creation of a frame narrative on the very last page, as Hoxworth Hale reveals himself as the narrator of this supposed memoir. For the majority of the novel, the reader is unaware that the narrator has any particular identity, yet now it is revealed that Hawaii’s narrator is the descendant of some of the first Calvinist missionaries and even of Native Hawaiian ali‘i, a prominent member of The Fort, and a man with immense political influence. There are brief moments of first-person interjection from the start of the novel, but as soon as Hale enters into the novel’s turn of events, he writes about himself and his actions solely in the third person. This deliberate masking of his identity and the novel’s surprise creation of a frame narrative are its final acts of deflection. When Hale reveals himself as the novel’s narrator, he says, “I can speak
with a certain authority about these matters, because I participated in them. […] I, too, am one of those Golden Men who see both the West and the East, who cherish the glowing past and who apprehend the obscure future; and the things I have written of in this memoir are very close to my heart” (937). Yet this appears to be an attempt both to distract from the painful episodes of racism of which he himself is an avid participant and to elide any potential unease by ending the novel with his naïve but overwhelmingly strong optimism about Hawai‘i’s future, all while positioning himself as one of the novel’s crowning “golden men.”

The “Golden Man” and the Myth of Primordial Utopian Multiracialism

_Hawaii_’s final chapter, titled “The Golden Men,” fully embodies the misguidedly idealistic interpretations of Hawai‘i’s “successful” multiracial culture and society. Michener uses this chapter to solidify the literary foundations for the most popular narrative of Hawai‘i’s culture: that of its status as a multiracial (and by extension, mixed-race) utopia. As a physical manifestation of the synthesis of Eastern and Western values, the “golden man” embodies everything that American expansionists hoped to cultivate in the postwar tourist in the mid-twentieth century. In this line of logic, his knowledge of cultures different from his own and his “natural” ability to occupy the space between these cultures is crucial for the maintenance of Hawai‘i’s social stability. This trope is used primarily to prove that Hawai‘i’s racial mixture is a sign of the potential for a racially harmonious future in the United States.

The novel establishes from its start that the primary cause of Hawai‘i’s racial/cultural uniqueness is its position as an isolated location that can
simultaneously act as a bridge between the United States and Asia. The novel’s first chapter, “From the Boundless Deep,” details the geological creation of the Hawaiian Islands millions of years ago, and by personifying the islands and exploring the implications of their development through the language of primordial destiny, Michener sets the foundation for how his readers should think about Hawai‘i: as a unique liminal space that is somehow inherently self-aware of its role in the biological development of plants, animals, and mankind alike. This chapter even contains the bare foundations for Hale’s later introduction of the Golden Men, as he explains the islands’ unique ability to allow new species of plants and animals to evolve, almost as if by chance, but equally fated by a higher power. Michener presents this process as something primordial and inevitable as he outlines with wonder how so many different species arrived in such an isolated place. Establishing species-related intermixture as something longstanding that persists to the novel’s final historical moment, this chapter naturalizes future settler colonialism in the islands. Hale writes (here as the novel’s then-anonymous and seemingly omnipotent narrator):

There was then, as there is now, no place known on earth that even began to compete with these islands in their capacity to encourage natural life to develop freely and radically up to its own best potential. More than nine out of ten things that grew here, grew nowhere else on earth. Why this should have been so remains a mystery. [...] But whatever the reason, the fact remains: in these islands new breeds developed, and they prospered, and they grew strong, and they multiplied. For these islands were a crucible of exploration and development. (15)

This chapter, when considered in conjunction with the rest of the novel, refutes the very idea that anything can be called indigenous, since all things had to arrive on the island somehow before they could stake their claim to the land. This idea calls into
question any legitimacy of Native Hawaiian grievances and their claim to the land as a lāhui.

Hale suggests that the racial and cultural synthesis of a “new species” of man in Hawai‘i is entirely natural, having been encoded in the scientific process of evolution itself, and already having occurred in the islands for millions of years. This portrayal of Hawai‘i as a breeding ground is especially troubling in conjunction with Hale’s personification of Hawai‘i as a beautiful, ethnically sexualized woman, simply waiting for the arrival of plants, animals, and people so that it can contribute to the natural development of these species:

These beautiful islands, waiting in the sun and storm, how much they seemed like beautiful women waiting for their men to come home at dusk, waiting with open arms and warm bodies and consolation. All that would be accomplished in these islands, as in these women, would be generated solely by the will and puissance of some man. I think the islands always knew this. (15-16)

This moment supports Hale’s ultimate assertion that the Golden Man is one of Hawai‘i’s crowning achievements but conflicts with his later assertion that the genesis of this new type of human is not at all related to racial intermixt-
ture or a specific type of breeding.

Michener’s Golden Man is borne not primarily of multiracial heritage but of a mental view that synthesizes European and Asian ways of thought. Opening the chapter, Hoxworth Hale defines the Golden Man as the following:

In 1946, […] a group of sociologists in Hawaii were perfecting a concept whose vague outlines had occupied them for some years, and quietly among themselves they suggested that in Hawaii a new type of man was being developed. He was a man influenced by both the west and the east, a man at home in either the business councils of New York or the philosophical retreats of Kyoto, a man wholly modern and American yet in tune with the ancient and the Oriental. The name they invented for him was the Golden Man. (807)
Here, classically stereotypical conceptualizations of America and Asia, rooted in an American expansionist superiority complex, arise; Asia is ancient and philosophical, while America is modern and business-oriented. To both Hale and Michener, the Golden Man’s ability to translate ‘old’ Asian cultures into the ‘new’ and ‘modern’ American business model is crucial for U.S. expansion into Asia and the Pacific. Yet interestingly, Hale is quick to dismiss any idea that his Golden Man is a product of miscegenation, as he continues:

At first I erroneously thought that both the concept and the name were derived from the fact that when races intermingled sexually, the result was apt to be a man neither all white nor all brown nor all yellow, but somewhere in between; and I thought that the Golden Man concept referred to the coloring of the new man—a blend of Chinese, Polynesian and Caucasian, for at this time Japanese rarely intermarried—and I went about the streets of Hawaii looking for the golden man of whom the sociologists spoke.

But in time I realized that this bright, hopeful man of the future, this unique contribution of Hawaii to the rest of the world, did not depend for his genesis upon racial intermarriage at all. He was a product of the mind. His was a way of thought, and not of birth. (807)

Although mixed-race people are a common occurrence in a multicultural society, Michener and Hale assert that any viewpoint rooted so strictly in racial heritage or ethnicity is ‘erroneous.’ They dismiss mixed-race identity not only as invalid but also as unproductive. He continues, “I have known a good many golden men in the secondary, or unimportant, sense: fine Chinese-Hawaiians, excellent Portuguese-Chinese and able Caucasian-Hawaiians; but most of them had little concept of what was happening either in Hawaii or in the world” (807). Racial or cultural background has no importance in the new, forward-thinking world of the novel’s Golden Man, making mixed-race identity into an irrelevant consequence of any multiracial society, not necessarily a means for social understanding. The four characters Hale names as
the Golden Men all conceive of themselves primarily as of one race, yet Hale takes a full paragraph for each of them to explain their genealogy and call attention to every instance of interracial mixture in their family history. He confusingly ends with a sentence noting that each of the men conceive of themselves primarily as one racial category – Hale, for example, “was known as pure haole, whatever that means” (810), despite his various European ethnic backgrounds and distant Native Hawaiian heritage. For someone who pretends to care so little about race, he takes a great interest in recording these characters’ multiracial heritages. Hale ends one of these descriptions saying, “In truth, all men are brothers, but as generations pass, it is differences that matter and not similarities” (817). Through these descriptions and in light of this statement, it seems that Hale is trying to discredit any conception of racial purity by calling attention to the characters’ mixed-race backgrounds.

However, the novel remains ultimately ambivalent as to whether these characters can be considered mixed-race at all. Christina Klein suggests that this contradiction between racial essentialism and pluralization favors the idea of racial interconnectedness, as she writes that the Golden Man discredits biologically-based conceptions of race by ultimately stressing how the characters are “[connected] to all races of the world.” Michener’s conception of Hawai‘i’s multiracial society, then, seems to be less grounded in the present moment and more rooted in a centuries-old

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27 The same can be said of James Michener himself, if we read his personal politics into the novel; although Hawaii seems to work hand-in-hand with his various pro-statehood discourses from the 1940s and 1950s that touted Hawai‘i’s multiracialism as one of its most crowning achievements, he still includes several pages of detailed genealogical charts as an appendix to the novel, where the reader can follow the lineages of all the main characters and find out exactly when and where racial lines ‘crossed’ in this person’s family history.

28 Klein, 258.
antiquity. In this way, the importance of mixed-race identity seems to be more a thing of the future. Although these men’s racial self-conceptions are primarily an afterthought as the novel concludes, the novel nevertheless lays the foundations for the idea that mixed-race identity and people are one of the signifiers of Hawai‘i’s natural destiny.

**Hawaii’s Depictions of Tourism and Kānaka Disenfranchisement**

Through its introduction and explication of the Golden Man trope, *Hawaii* contributed to the literary foundation for how white Americans living after World War II conceived of racial mixtures that black and white models of race did not accommodate, thus facilitating the departure from the mixed-race “tragic mulatto” narrative. However, the novel remains inextricably bound to whiteness as the ultimate racial ideal and ultimately uses this departure to promote assimilation into American whiteness as the ultimate goal of Hawai‘i’s inclusion. At several points, the novel tries to distance itself from the contemporary American narrative of the struggle for African American civil rights amidst deep antiblack racism in the U.S., echoing numerous Americans’ historical efforts to paint Hawai‘i as the multiethnic, specifically Asian panacea that could “save” the United States. Aspects of the black/white divide in contemporary America seep into the novel, as it displays instances of antiblackness from both a white American standpoint and a Native Hawaiian’s desire to distance himself from blackness. One of Hale’s Golden Men, Kelly Kanakoa works on Waikīkī Beach, helping American tourists learn how to surf
and often engaging in brief sexual relationships with many of the female tourists.

Introducing him to the readers, Hale writes,

At mealttime he would throw a small towel about his waist, tucking in the ends as if it were a sarong, and the wahine from Montgomery or Atlanta or Birmingham would admire him as he lolled about the davenport. Once such a girl said, “You’re awfully close to a nigra, Kelly, and yet you aren’t. It’s fascinating.”

“Hawaiians hate niggers,” Kelly assured her, and she felt better. (824)

The role of the Native Hawaiian body in American antiblackness is equally fascinating, as the southern woman focuses on Kelly’s darkness. Although his brown skin means that he could be as dark as an African American man, his Hawaiian exoticism – in conjunction with Hawai‘i’s representation in tourism-oriented sections of the novel as a place inherently outside of American territory – exempts him from encountering the same kind of racial prejudice that incites violence in the U.S. Instead, this exemption has turned into fetishization: the woman’s fascination is representative of many Americans’ views of Native Hawaiian people at that time, exaggerated and exacerbated by Hawai‘i’s tourism industry. Hawai‘i’s conception as a nation that had graciously opened itself up to American intervention and that could simultaneously release the U.S. from the burden of its own racism was especially important to Michener. This quip of an exchange between Kelly and a

29 Kelly’s friend Florsheim enumerates the more self-Orientalizing aspects of this perfectly: “Allatime New York dey got pitchas wid’ colors ‘Come to Hawaii!’ An’ dey show dis rock wid wahines, grass skirts, flowahs in de hair, wiggin’ de hips like to speak, ‘You come to Hawaii, mister, we gonna screw till you dizzy. […] But de punny t’ing, Kelly blalah, it ain’ so easy to ketch a wahine on dis rock. It ain’ dem mainland kanakas has de good time ovah heah, it’s de wahines. ou know what I t’ink, blalah? […] I t’ink mo bettah dey get you ’n’ me on de pitchas.’ And he fell into an exaggerated pose, his muscles flexed, his dark eyes staring out to sea past Diamond Head, and he made an ideal travel poster. Relaxing with laughter he yelled, ‘Kelly blalah, we de real attraction.’” (841)

30 Christina Klein writes that because of Hawai‘i’s “negligible” African American population, “Michener and other commentators [could] recast American race relations in Asian-white
southern woman he eventually sleeps with is the novel’s only noticeable foray into contemporary American race relations. With Hawai‘i’s “ideological value”\(^{31}\) in mind, it reads as an attempt to prove that southern Americans’ racism could be overcome with the inclusion of Native Hawaiians and their confusingly but enticingly dark bodies into the American populace.

Yet Michener also writes an episode in this last chapter between Kelly and a white woman from the U.S. that offers the view of Hawai‘i as the land of the dispossessed, referring not only to Native Hawaiian disenfranchisement but also to the hypocrisy of the tourism industry. However, as these episodes come from the narrative voice of Hoxworth Hale, these episodes seem to ultimately suggest that the Hawaiian people, having participated in their own disenfranchisement, makes Hawai‘i the perfect place for the United States’ social, cultural, and political intervention, leading to the creation of a new type of multiculturalism. Michener complicates Kelly’s character when he meets an American woman named Elinor Henderson, who comes to Hawai‘i with the intention of expanding on journals that her great-great-great-grandfather, a nineteenth-century missionary, had written about Hawai‘i to turn them into a book of her own. Their relationship shows Michener’s readers that Kelly, who to this point spoke almost entirely in Pidgin, can switch to standard English easily and that he thinks critically about his identity as a Native

\[31\] Klein, 260.
Hawaiian man in a growingly white imperialist Hawai‘i. As the pair’s relationship progresses, it challenges both individuals’ ideas of Hawai‘i’s past, present, and future. As the two get to know each other, Elinor explains that her predecessor wrote that “our God saved the islands, but our ideas killed them. Particularly the Hawaiians” (829). His “prophetic passage about the Hawaiian of the future” reminds Elinor of Kelly, and she reads it to him: “The Hawaiian is destined to diminish year by year, dispossessed, distraught and confused” (829).

Contrary to the opinions of white Fort leaders like Hale, both Elinor and her great-great-great-grandfather saw the harms that western Christian education were doing to the Native Hawaiian people. While Hale and the others see only the businesses, practices, and institutions that their missionary predecessors established in the 1800s, Elinor sees the nationwide displacement that their cultural and ideological meddling had caused. When Kelly asks why she would call her book *The Dispossessed*, Elinor responds:

> You don’t have your islands. The Japanese have them. You don’t have the money. The Chinese have that. You don’t have the land. The Fort has that. And you don’t have your gods. My ancestors took care of that. What do you have? (830)

Kelly, however, argues much differently, asserting instead that the descendants of the white American missionaries are the truly dispossessed:

> They came here to bring Congregationalism, but we despised their brand of Christianity. Now most of us are Catholics or Mormons. Today we have nearly as many Buddhists in the islands as Congregationalists. Likewise, they

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32 Kelly’s mother Malama later reflects her resignation after revealing to her son that Hong Kong Kee had been chosen to manage the Kanakaoa Trust, previously the largest Hawaiian-owned land estate in the novel. She says, “By ourselves, we Hawaiians cannot maintain our position in the new world that surrounds us. I was staggering under frightful burdens till Hong Kong came along” (917). This concession solidifies the stereotype of Kānaka Maoli as helpless, disenfranchised, and dependent on the benevolence of others.
came with a God they believed in. How many of them still have that God?
And they had big ideas. Now all they have is money. (837)

To Kelly, the truly dispossessed are the members of The Fort, who have lost any of the idealism, true good will, and faith that their ancestors came with a century prior. Describing them now as godless, narrow-minded, and greedy, Kelly offers one of the most honest opinions he has given of the white elite up to this point, complicating any tidy notions of The Fort’s secure power by suggesting that they too have lost parts of themselves as a result of generations of power-grabbing and infighting. Additionally, Elinor’s presence briefly ruptures the idyllic illusion of Hawaiian tourism. She turns to Kelly, asking the ethnicities of the girls who are dancing hula in front of them at the Lagoon in Waikīkī, and who are all incidentally of mixed-race ancestry:

So, what we call Hawaiian culture is really a girl from the Philippines, wearing a cellophane skirt from Tahiti, playing a ukulele from Portugal, backed up by a loud-speaker guitar from New York, singing a phony ballad from Hollywood. (831)

The exploitation of Hawaiian culture as a result of the postwar proliferation of tourism is especially evident here, as Elinor calls attention to the inauthentic and caricatural way the industry sells Hawai‘i to America. Yet again, following the novel’s trend, only outsiders to the islands seem to offer any sort of prescient criticism of its politics and culture. While Kelly likely knows all of this already, he nevertheless makes his livelihood off of the curiosity of white Americans (particularly women) about Native Hawaiian culture, playing the part of the exotic-but-not-too-foreign Native in order to sustain himself.

Michener’s explorations of tourism in Hawai‘i suggest that mixture – whether interracial, intercultural, or otherwise – is not about race, but instead all about power.
In many ways, Hawai‘i’s power comes only in its perceived value to the powerful white elite of the U.S. Throughout the novel, The Fort works to establish itself as so essential to the upkeep and sustained “progress” of Hawai‘i’s society that their word is too often seen as the novel’s ultimate truth. In many ways, they have succeeded; having been victims of white imperialism at the hands of both the United States and individual Americans, the people of Michener’s Hawai‘i have emerged unable to imagine life without their oppressors. Their social norms, ideals, and presence have been normalized to the extent that nothing seems to be able to counter the dispossession of any and all people in the islands of Hawai‘i.

**Effacement and Reversal: The Paradox of Hale’s Sentimental Discourse**

Hale’s final statements assert that Hawai‘i’s days of white racism are definitively over. He writes that election day in 1954 was the day when “Hawaii realized with astonished pain that for the first time since the islands had joined America, Democrats were going to control both houses. The days were forever past when Republicans dominated by The Fort could rule the islands with impunity” (935). Yet Hale’s—and by extension, Michener’s—description of the 1954 elections, which did indeed result in a significant loss of legislative power for the Hawai‘i Republican party, reflects a kind of naïve optimism that fails to truly dismantle The Fort’s seemingly totalitarian quest for economic and political control. It seems as though with one sentence, the novel tries to dismiss the lasting effects of white power in the islands, pretending that this moment could entirely eliminate white hegemony and subsequently dismissing any potential claims that this was not the case.
Hale’s sentimental optimism leaves no room for conversation, and certainly no room for dissent. His emotional expression of his hope for Hawai‘i’s utopic multiracial future concludes the novel, and from within this sentimental framework, Michener’s readers were convinced that Hawai‘i was on its way to harmonious racial integration simply because this character said it would be so. Yet these emotions do nothing to disprove any prior instances of Hale’s own violent racism and pursuit of hegemonic power, which ultimately suggest that the novel’s final image of Hawai‘i’s harmonious potential is nothing but a fantasy.

Despite this, the novel was received overwhelmingly positively when it was published in November 1959, gaining praise from even Hawai‘i Senator Daniel K. Inouye, the first Japanese American member of the U.S. Congress, while many in the continental U.S. saw the novel as “an expanded tourist guidebook to the new state.”33 Christina Klein writes, “Reviewers described the novel as a ‘comprehensive social history of our 50th state,’ praised its ‘wealth of scholarship,’ and located it in literary-historical terms as an heir to the ‘documentary novel of the Nineteen Thirties.’”34 For many years after its debut, Hawaii served as “part of a cultural-educational apparatus that deployed the islands as a means through which Americans could learn the value of racial tolerance. It was both a representation of racial integration and a device for achieving that integration in practice. With this novel, Michener took on the task of teaching his readers the political and racial lessons of Hawaii.”35

33 Klein, 252.
34 Klein, 253.
35 Klein, 252.
With this in mind, it is easy to dismiss *Hawaii* as a confusing, enigmatic contradiction mired in the sensationalism of its genre. While it pretends to be an enthusiastic case for the incorporation of the islands into the United States, trying to show the merits of Hawai‘i’s multiculturalism and the success of its incorporation of Asians into its society, numerous episodes throughout the 900-page epic betray Michener’s pro-statehood project. His representations of white racism, the disenfranchising effects of white imperialism, and skillful omissions of Hawaiian history prove that even in the midst of statehood, Hawai‘i in 1959 had not overcome and was still struggling to excise the interracial prejudice and flat-out racism that had plagued its society for generations.

Yet most of Michener’s readers (just like the novel itself) did not interrogate white hegemony in Hawai‘i. Dismissing the novel as an ill-conceived, poorly executed mess ignores the massive amount of ideological work that *Hawaii* did to bring the islands to the forefront of postwar American consciousness. It is because this book sold so many copies and served so many Americans as a guidebook for the nation’s state that the images of an exotic racial idyll have persisted for so many decades. *Hawaii*’s sensationalism and calculated historical allegory are precisely what made it so popular, and its final image of a territory united in its novel sense of multiracial American democracy allowed for a blithely misguided and naively simplistic interpretation of Hawai‘i’s history and people.
Chapter Two: Lois-Ann Yamanaka, Local Literature, and the 1990s Multiculturalist Movement in Hawai‘i

“It’s a big industry, the exotification of Hawaii and its people. ‘Hawaii 5-0,’ ‘The Hawaiians,’ James Michener’s ‘Hawaii,’ making Hawaii into every white man’s dream, ‘Magnum PI,’ ‘Byrds of Paradise.’ It goes on and on. It’s nice now that we have ownership of our own stories.”

– Lois-Ann Yamanaka, 1996

“Writers associated with Bamboo Ridge purport to speak on behalf of an entire ‘local community,’ thereby imposing their values on that same community. This assumed role has given middle-class Asians a prominent and dominating place on the topography of Hawai‘i; and, in their role as spokespersons, by some geographic and ethnographic sleight of hand, they have otherized Native Hawaiians, written them off the map.”

– Rodney Morales, 1998

While views like James Michener’s of a racially harmonious Hawai‘i could be found in American discourse from as early as the 1800s, works like Hawaii solidified this narrative’s cultural prevalence in the first half of the twentieth century. To most of America by 1959, Hawai‘i was at the very least an idyllic tourist destination, where the average white American could escape from the perils of racial unrest while still staying within the boundaries of the American nation. Hawai‘i’s tourist industry wholeheartedly embraced this narrative, twisting and amplifying it in order to attract more white Americans to the newest part of the United States, but this narrative was

1 Quoted by Valerie Takahama in “Controversial Adventures in ‘Paradise’: Bully Burgers and Pidgin.” The Orange County Register, 2/15/1996.
neither created nor maintained by Hawai‘i’s local people of color, instead by those seeking to maintain haole hegemony in the islands.

Taking issue with this kind of exclusion, a large group of Hawai‘i’s authors and poets fought to establish the boundaries of Hawai‘i’s Local literature and identity starting in the 1970s. Haole hegemony – specifically, that of U.S. imperial, economic, and military interests in these islands and their people – persisted structurally, economically, socially, and literarily; the works of a small handful of white, mainland-born American, typically male authors continued to dictate the boundaries of “Hawai‘i literature” only until the last few decades of the millennium. At the helm of a literary movement which arose as a result of renewed Hawaiian cultural and political activism, Hawai‘i’s writers of color sought to define what Hawai‘i meant to them in opposition to a long tradition of literary and historical erasure.

Yet this conception of Hawai‘i’s Local literature, despite its successes in giving voice back to the marginalized communities of the Hawaiian Islands, did not come without its share of controversy. After the postwar cultural era of Elvis’s Hawai‘i films, James Michener, and the skewed political rhetoric of the islands’ so-called inherent Americanness, Hawai‘i’s resident writers faced a unique (and still largely unresolved) challenge in rewriting a colonial history that continues to cause immense cultural and linguistic damage to this day.

3 This includes Mark Twain (with his unpublished 1884 Hawai‘i novel), James Michener, A. Grove Day, Carl Stroven, et al.
General Characteristics of Late Twentieth-Century Hawai‘i Literature

Even in the midst of a confusing ethnic pluralism, many of the most popular literary works that emerged from Hawai‘i starting in the 1970s all worked to show life on a side of the islands less frequented by the white American or visiting outsider, reclaiming a relationship to a land and a cultural identity that has been co-opted, exaggerated, and bastardized by the tourist industry and American military complex for generations. In reading 1990s novels by authors such as Lois-Ann Yamanaka, Chris McKinney, R. Zamora Linmark, and even Graham Salisbury, I noticed an almost universal look into the past as these authors attempt to rewrite history and reconfigure local identity and everyday life outside of the colonial history and haole literary canon that set out to exclude them. In doing this, they also set their books 20-30 years prior to their present moment at the turn of the millennium. This historical revision goes hand in hand with a shift in setting, as Local narratives moved away from the tourist center of the Honolulu area to focus instead on more rural, non-commercial locales. Most of Yamanaka’s works, for example, are set on the Big Island of Hawai‘i in the 1970s or late 1960s. R. Zamora Linmark’s Rolling the R’s (1999) is also set in the 1970s in Wai‘anae, on the more rural west side of O‘ahu. Likewise, Graham Salisbury’s Blue Skin of the Sea (1992) is set in 1960s Kailua-Kona, also on the Big Island. Yet even without a retrospective or coming-of-age slant, many 1990s novels still demonstrate a shift from town to country, as in Chris McKinney’s The Tattoo (1999), which takes place in Ka‘a‘awa, a similarly under-developed suburb on the Windward (east) side of O‘ahu.
Works such as these often place the rural and the urban in direct opposition with each other, often choosing to antagonize the urban as a site of corruption, sprawl, and lost identity. Chris McKinney’s The Tattoo follows protagonist Ken Hideyoshi, in jail for murdering his father, as he tells his cellmate Cal his life story. Moving through his childhood and upbringing on the Windward side of O‘ahu in Kaʻa‘awa and leading up to the story of his crime, Ken repeatedly makes a clear distinction between town⁵ and country, ruminating on what one’s place of origin dictates in one’s character. Cal writes, “He was not even the Hawai‘i townie Japanee, the upper middle-class Pearl City-living, private-school-attending, baseball-playing, gel-haired, stereo-pounding, my-dad’s-name-is-Glenn (he wears an aloha shirt to work) fucking dime-a-dozen Japanee. He wasn’t a townie, he was country” (3-4). Ken’s childhood friend Koa, reflecting on the differences between their hometown of Kaʻa‘awa and “town,” even says, “Fuck, good ting still get places dat da tourists no see. Good ting we keep most of dose fuckas in Waikiki” (69). The Tattoo also offers direct commentary on the divide between Hawai‘i and the “mainland,” referring to the continental United States. After Ken’s girlfriend Claudia proposes that they move to California, Ken protests, narrating,

I cringed. There was no way I was going to the fucking mainland. Fucking wall-to-wall haoles there, the rat race, a world filled with people I couldn’t relate to. I turned around, grabbing the soap and cloth away from her. I told her to turn around and began washing her back. “C’mon Claude, you know I couldn’t survive up there. Fuck, up there they expect their Asians to be docile. How many haole asses would I have to kick before I got any respect up there?” (165)

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² Colloquially, “town” refers to any and all areas surrounding the city of Honolulu. Especially for those living on the Windward side, “town” refers to any place on the other side of the Koʻolau Mountains, one of the two major mountain ranges running down the height of O‘ahu. In this way, “town” is a geographical marker, and explicitly one of separation – the Windward side is physically secluded from any and all parts “town” by mountains.
This novel is interesting in that it is not a bildungsroman—it has adult characters and explicitly adult themes—but is far more didactic about Hawai‘i’s multiculturalism than Yamanaka’s work, for example. McKinney’s novel is rooted in this notion of insurmountable interracial conflict, as Ken stresses his presentiment that he would be ostracized on the mainland. This sort of direct commentary on the cultural, social, and racial divides between Hawai‘i and the United States is not atypical of late twentieth-century Hawai‘i literature, but the way in which McKinney has deployed this comparison is more heavy-handed. That his characters are all adults also speaks to the perceived permanence of this conflict; his characters do not grow from this sort of difference but are mired in it, and the novel remains stuck in its preconceptions about race and difference.

Furthermore, in Hawai‘i literature the dichotomy between town and country is explicitly linked to industrial development and the loss of history, whether that history be Hawaiian or non-Hawaiian, and this change is seen as an overwhelming loss. This sense of loss also comes in the form of dichotomous language, or the binary between Hawaiian Pidgin English and American Standard English. Many writers from the 1960s on chose to write predominantly in pidgin, most commonly heralded as the colloquial language of Hawai‘i’s working class and thus seen as another emblem of local identity, in order to fight the stigma of its reputation as a so-called uneducated language. (I will return to this discussion later in the chapter with Lois-Ann Yamanaka.)

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6 Throughout this thesis, I have refrained from referring to the United States as the “mainland.” This implies not only that Hawai‘i is an inherent part of the U.S., but that Hawai‘i is only relevant as part of the U.S. However, most people in Hawai‘i do refer to the American continent as “the mainland” in everyday speech.
In his 1991 analysis of the origins of Hawai‘i literature, Stephen Sumida offers possible literary roots in what he calls Hawai‘i’s “complex idyll” with foundations in the pastoral. In a discussion of Milton Murayama’s 1979 novel *All I Asking For Is My Body* and John Dominis Holt’s 1975 *Waimea Summer*, he writes that these two works “mark the coming of age of the homegrown, complex pastoral of Hawai‘i. […] They share, that is, an important element of a local sensitivity, which includes the ability to note the telling details, insignificant to outsiders but vital to the child of that land.”7 In dealing with interracial and intergenerational conflicts, thriving vestiges of imperialist America, and young protagonists’ reckonings with history and place, both novels search to find sense among a decades-long history of misunderstanding and difference. Another point of reference is what he calls Hawai‘i’s “childhood idyll,” dealing explicitly with a loss of innocence, both individual and communal, and standing “as implicit critiques of a present-day Hawai‘i already vastly changed since the time of even a young writer’s childhood.”8 Sumida elaborates:

[The] childhood idyll seems to be favored more usually by writers in the beginning stages of planting their claim in Hawai‘i’s cultural history. These writers have, in some respects, broken from or altered literary conventions that do not fit their sense of Hawai‘i or of themselves; they are engaged in discovering something fresh and honest to say about everyday life.9

These kinds of works often take the bildungsroman form, and the coming-of-age novel has been a popular subset of Hawai‘i literatures for decades.10 The

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7 Stephen Sumida, *And the View from the Shore: Literary Traditions of Hawai‘i*, 110.
8 Sumida, 89.
9 Sumida, 108.
10 I remember, for example, reading *Blue Skin of the Sea* in seventh grade, and always wanting to read one of Yamanaka’s books from as early as middle school but being told by my parents that they were slightly too mature for me in my younger age.
overwhelming presence of the a young protagonist seeing Hawaiʻi through innocent eyes and slowly becoming aware of its economic development, militarization, and daily struggles in the wake of U.S. imperialism shows that Hawaiʻi’s children grow up with an awareness, even if only elementary, of the ways colonialism has changed and continues to impact Hawaiʻi. The authors’ criticisms of Hawaiʻi’s development are explicit, as they take no steps to cover up anti-American (anti-haole) sentiments, just as McKinney includes Koa’s criticisms of “dose fuckas in Waikiki.” Oftentimes, their recognition of this social and cultural change is a key focus of these novels, often tenuously linked with the process of growing up on the whole. While The Tattoo can be conceived as a bildungsroman, as it details events from Ken’s childhood, the novel is narrated from a distinct point in its participant narrator’s later adulthood. As an adult, Ken has solidified several stereotypical notions of race that he seems to want to teach to his audience. Yamanaka’s works, on the other hand, feature participant-narrator protagonists who are still children, and thus not yet fossilized in their ways of thinking.

Finally, Local literature written by Hawaiʻi’s people of color often predominantly features protagonist-narrators and mixed-race characters in the style of the Local bildungsroman. Novels like Blue Skin of the Sea, Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers, Name Me Nobody, and even The Tattoo to a certain extent all focus on the coming-of-age of young Hawaiʻi residents struggling to come to grips with their family history, ethnic identity, and place in Hawaiʻi’s society. In many cases, this struggle is complicated by mixed-race identity, which places these young characters
in conversation with racial essentialism at a very early age. Furthermore, many of these coming-of-age novels also take the structure of a string of vignette chapters, not necessarily following a clear plot but instead exploring several distinct episodes, arranged chronologically but often with months or years in between each chapter.

The 1990s also saw the proliferation of both literary and critical anthologies about Hawai‘i and American multiracial literature. Local literary press Bamboo Ridge Press has published several collections of poetry and short stories since their founding in 1978. Many more literary critics began to explore Hawai‘i’s multiculturalism, including writers in Michael Haas’s *Multicultural Hawai‘i* (1998), Sumida’s *And the View from the Shore* (1991), a 1997 literary anthology edited by James Stanton, and a 1999 “best of Honolulu fiction” anthology published by Bamboo Ridge. Hawai‘i was also occasionally mentioned in U.S.-based mixed-race anthologies, these collections often failed to capture the nuance of Hawai‘i’s interracial culture, glossing over colonial history, contemporary interracial tensions, and stereotypes of hapa and mixed-race people in order to place Hawai‘i more cohesively within the broader American narrative. Many of these anthologies likewise co-opted the use of the word hapa without situating it in its Hawaiian context, dehistoricizing it and using it too frequently to describe any person of mixed-

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11 Sonny Mendoza in *Blue Skin of the Sea*, for example, is half Portuguese, yet still calls himself “a white fishboy punk” (169). Sonny’s confusion about his racial identity, especially in conjunction with the fact that his white mother died soon after he was born, remains one of the central facets of the novel.

12 e.g. *Multiracial America* and *Racially Mixed in America*. See bibliography.
race ancestry, rather than specifically to describe people of Native Hawaiian
descent.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Reclaiming Hawai‘i’s Multiculturalism and the Local Literary Renaissance}

In many ways, the life and work of Hawai‘i author Lois-Ann Yamanaka
embody the heated controversies of the 1990s debate about the neocolonial(ist)
aspects of Local literature. Born in 1961 on the island of Moloka‘i, Yamanaka grew
up on a sugarcane plantation in Pahala on the island of Hawai‘i. Her works include a
book of poetry, \textit{Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre} (1993), and several novels
including \textit{Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers} (1993), \textit{Blu’s Hanging} (1997), \textit{Heads by
Harry} (1998), \textit{Name Me Nobody} (1999), \textit{Father of the Four Passages} (2001), \textit{The
Heart’s Language} (2005), and \textit{Behold the Many} (2006). After decades of writing, she
currently works at the Na‘au Learning Center in Nu‘uanu, a school she established to
cultivate literacy and creativity among Hawai‘i’s youth. Yamanaka has been both
locally and nationally recognized as an exemplary Asian American writer, as the list
of her literary achievements is long: she was the recipient of a grant from the National
Endowment for the Humanities (1990), the Pushcart Prize for Poetry (1993 and
1994), a Carnegie Foundation Grant (1994), a grant from the National Endowment for
the Arts (1994), the Rona Jaffe Award for Women Writers (1996), and the Lannan
Literary Award (1998).\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} This problem persists even today, although many in the American mixed-race community
are slowly realizing that this usage (e.g. using “hapa” to refer only to mixed-race Asians)
erases Native Hawaiian culture and identity. For further discussion, see Chapter Three.
\textsuperscript{14} Listed on Yamanaka’s biographical page from her time at the University of Washington.
\href{http://faculty.washington.edu/kendo/yamanaka.html}{http://faculty.washington.edu/kendo/yamanaka.html}
Yamanaka’s controversial style and content broke out onto the national literary stage when she was awarded the Asian American Studies National Book Award in 1998 for her latest novel, *Heads by Harry*. Many, however, took issue with Yamanaka’s stereotypical and seemingly callous representations of Filipino men, criticizing that they take only the roles of sexual aggressors and perpetrators of assault. After some members of the audience literally turned their backs to the stage at her award reception, the association decided to rescind the award, echoing on a national scale many of the same controversies and concerns about the representation of marginalized ethnic groups that weighed down Hawai‘i’s growing Local literary movement.\(^{15}\)

Many of the literary trends I have described fit into a logical anticolonial progression when considering the cultural climate in Hawai‘i in the decades after statehood. Just as the African American civil rights movement gained more ground in the United States in the 1960s, Hawai‘i saw the dawn of a Native Hawaiian cultural revival, commonly called the Hawaiian Renaissance. Primarily a movement to reinstate the importance of Native Hawaiian culture after hundreds of years of its degradation by white outsiders (concurrent with the push to un-ban spoken Hawaiian language from public schools\(^{16}\)), the Hawaiian Renaissance was an age of both renewed political activism\(^{17}\) and an intense revitalization of Native Hawaiian culture,

\(^{15}\) Candace Fujikane, “Reimagining Development and the Local in Lois-Ann Yamanaka’s *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre*.”

\(^{16}\) The Hawaiian language was banned in public schools from 1896 (during Hawai‘i’s intermediary period of as the Republic of Hawai‘i before annexation) to 1978.

\(^{17}\) Activism around the military bombardement of Kaho‘olawe and protecting sacred Hawaiian cites from desecration also establishes the Hawaiian Renaissance as one of the foundations of the Native Hawaiian sovereignty movement.
The 1960s and 1970s saw an explosion of Hawaiian art, dance, and music, often in the Hawaiian language, along with the proliferation of organizations and institutions to recognize and preserve these new expressions of Hawaiian culture. Kanaka Maoli activist Bumpy Kanahele, also widely considered to be one of the most prominent figures of the renaissance, cited a desire to take back Hawaiian culture from tourists and outsiders after years of its degradation in a 1979 speech. He speaks to the joy that should come with recognizing the resilience of the Hawaiian culture, but likewise cautions against understanding this moment as a strictly traditionalist movement, placing more significance in the ways this collective revival is more than simply one of arts and culture, but of personal value, heritage, pride, and belonging. Kanahele also stresses that this movement was taken up by Native Hawaiian and non-ethnic Hawaiian residents alike, supporting that non-Hawaiians had just as much of a stake in this cultural revival:

Today there are probably as many non-ethnic Hawaiians as there are Hawaiians actively engaged in the Renaissance: haoles, Japanese, Chinese, Filipinos, etc. People who have no Hawaiian ancestry but who for one reason or another have come to identify themselves culturally, psychologically and spiritually with Hawaiianness. […] The beautiful thing about the Renaissance is that it offers Hawaiians the greatest opportunity we have had since

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18 This was not the first time that attempted revitalizations of Native Hawaiian culture and tradition took place in Hawai‘i. Bumpy Kanahele cites moments as early as King Kalākaua’s efforts to revive mele hula in the 1880s. See Kanahele, “The Hawaiian Renaissance” (1979).
19 For example, John Dominis Holt’s 1964 work On Being Hawaiian, in which the author asserts his Native Hawaiian identity in the face of a long history of colonial erasure, is often cited as one of the foundational texts of the Hawaiian Renaissance.
20 Kanahele is a founder of Pu‘uhonua o Waimānalo, a sovereign homestead on O‘ahu.
22 “Understand, therefore, that the Renaissance does not mean a literal rebirth of classical Hawaiian traditions, dances, chants and so forth. To believe otherwise is to make a fetish out of tradition. We’ve lost too much already. […] Thus, in our efforts to rediscover our roots, to reaffirm our heritage, to revive our past, we cannot always be too clear about precisely what we are rediscovering, reaffirming, or reviving. It may well be that much, if not most, of what we are reviving is new traditions that look like old traditions” (Kanahele, 1979).
Kamehameha I to unify the people of these islands not by the power of the sword but by the influence of our ideals, [our] values and our aloha.23 Thus, taking a note from the Native Hawaiians, non-Hawaiian residents and artists soon began the push for a redefinition of local identity in Hawai‘i as early as the 1960s, beginning with literature and the arts.

As part of their efforts to reassert the importance of nonwhite ethnic identity and culture, Hawai‘i’s resident artists turned their efforts to the haole-dominated academic elite, both at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa and in the Hawai‘i literary canon more broadly.24 In June 1978, they held a literary conference they called “Talk Story, Our Voices in Literature and Song: Hawai‘i’s Ethnic American Writers’ Conference,” sponsored by the Hawai‘i Literary Arts Council. Writers like Maxine Hong Kingston,25 O.A. Bushnell, and numerous others came to speak at the conference as the local community began to reflect on the political impact of their writings and identities.

Only after the Talk Story Conference did Hawai‘i writers begin to conceive of Local Hawai‘i literature as a tradition in and of itself.26 Two of these writers, Eric Chock and Darrell Lum, founded their own literary press in this same year, which they devoted to publishing and promoting a brand of multiculturally-minded “local literature.” Bamboo Ridge Press has asserted itself in the decades since its founding as one of the most prolific literary presses in Hawai‘i, with as much academic and

23 Kanahele, “The Hawaiian Renaissance.”
24 Morales, 110.
25 While Kingston is no longer considered a “local” Hawai‘i writer, her prominence in the greater ethnic studies field made her an easy choice as a speaker. At the time of the conference, she was living in Hawai‘i, working on her upcoming novel The Woman Warrior.
26 Morales, 110-111.
everyday clout as the University of Hawai‘i Press. Aside from novels and other short works, Bamboo Ridge has published quarterly literary collections of works by self-professed Local writers of many different ethnicities, often making a concerted antiestablishment effort not to include any white American writers in order to “keep the local local.”

Yet criticisms of Bamboo Ridge and of their type of Local literature more broadly heated up in the years after the Talk Story Conference. Especially as the Hawaiian Renaissance became more politicized, more Hawai‘i writers—both Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian—were concerned with the press’s disproportionate tendency to publish works by middle-class Asian or mixed-race Asian writers who conceived of local identity almost exclusively from a post-plantation standpoint, often reproducing harmful stereotypes about other ethnic groups. For inspiration, many of these authors looked to their own familial histories, as descendants of workers of color both from Hawai‘i and imported from the Philippines, Japan, China, Korea, and Portugal by white plantation owners to work in the sugarcane industry in the 1800s. Plantation culture led to an unprecedented amount of racial mixture in Hawai‘i as the workers forged relationships across racial lines despite efforts by the plantation owners to keep them segregated. Hawaiian pidgin developed as a result, and thus many Local writers in the 1990s saw plantation history as one of the foundations of Hawai‘i culture.27 Critics also took issue with the brand of multiculturalism that Bamboo Ridge and others seemed to encourage, not only in the works they chose to publish in their quarterly collections but also in the ways the press positioned itself in

the development of Hawai‘i’s ethnic literature. Rodney Morales cites The Best of Bamboo Ridge, a 1986 anthology, as emblematic of the exclusionary problems of the developing Local canon. Acknowledging the “historical timeliness” of Hawai‘i’s development of ethnic literature and its importance in filling “both a community and a scholarly void,” he notes the marked absence of Native Hawaiian and Filipino writers and the overwhelming weight given to East Asian themes. In a scathing 1998 essay, he writes:

We appear to have a troubling multiculturalism that engages the rhetoric of sharing and fair play, but in reality (as real locals might say) it may be a new brand of colonialism in which successful Asians have established a hegemonic relationship over those who are less fortunate. […] Writers associated with Bamboo Ridge purport to speak on behalf of an entire ‘local community,’ thereby imposing their values on that same community. This assumed role has given middle-class Asians a prominent and dominating place on the topography of Hawai‘i; and, in their role as spokespersons, by some geographic and ethnographic sleight of hand, they have otherized Native Hawaiians, written them off the map.

Native Hawaiians have been categorically excluded from this neocolonialist conception of an emerging ethnicity-based canon of Local literature. Other historically underprivileged groups, like Filipinos and Portuguese, have also been excluded, although many of Hawai‘i’s more prominent ethnic writers and scholars in this period denied that this was an intentional exclusion. Yet the perception remains, for sociologists and literary critics alike, that the 1990s-era conception of “local Hawai‘i literature” was a predominantly middle-class Asian field, often perpetuating racist stereotypes of Native Hawaiians and Filipinos in particular. As a result, the

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28 Morales, 112.
29 Morales, 114-115.
institutions that upheld these categorical exclusions, such as the University of Hawai‘i system and Bamboo Ridge Press, became magnets for this kind of criticism.

Stephen Sumida frequently references his experiences at the Talk Story Conference in his 1991 discussion of Hawai‘i literature’s slant toward a pluralizing multiculturalism. In the mid-1970s, for example, the Hawai‘i Literary Arts Council (HLAC) rarely dealt with works published in Hawaiian Pidgin. Yet Sumida is quick to dismiss criticisms of the conference’s problematic multiculturalism, as he writes, “The very notion of a ‘Local literature’ was indeed a contradiction in terms to those who could not comprehend pluralism, a diversity within a whole based on racial equality and not hierarchy, or the idea of anything ‘local’ being so distinguished as to have a ‘literature.’”

He even anticipates later defenses of Bamboo Ridge as he concludes his book thus:

There is the possibility that understandings of the polyethnic literatures of Hawai‘i in particular, in a microcosmic, paradigmatic way, may improve what always needs improvement: the quality of imagination, the intellect, values, art, and life in the communities where writers and readers must actively cultivate views by their interpretive and expressive use of words from their shores.

Sumida sees this multiculturalism as a primarily unifying force, yet even his long formal analysis of Hawai‘i literature at times reproduces the idealistic sleight of hand that Morales criticizes, as his analysis focuses heavily on Japanese American and Asian American identity.


30 Sumida, 249.
31 Sumida, 272.
and Local Literature in the 1990s” as an attempt to deflect some of the more prominent criticisms of Bamboo Ridge’s editorial choices. However, Chock nevertheless fails to see the harms of this multicultural idealization, contesting instead that it has more of a power for unification than separation:

What we have been doing can be aligned with a corrupted notion of multiculturalism which romanticizes the American dream (or the Aloha Spirit) while perpetuating the imbalance of power among ethnic groups in the United States. While it is easy to find overlap between working toward an ideal and having romantic visions, this is a necessary condition for all art. We would make the distinction that what happens in this intellectual space will reflect the real world but move toward an ideal. […] Again, given the long view, it is a myth that we are ethnically biased in what we publish.  

Sumida and Chock represent the reflexive tendency of the Local literary movement’s initial founders to defend their canon at all costs. While Chock tries to offer proof that Bamboo Ridge is biased, he ultimately fails, only giving a lukewarm defense of the values of multiculturalism, almost childlike in its idealism. Chock’s emphatic support of ethnic pluralism exposes echoes of even Michener’s pluralist rhetoric:

In the intellectual space of the literary arena, we can project that more ideal sense of a multicultural world where many voices will be heard. In that arena, ethnicity will be an influential factor, perhaps a tool toward gaining visibility and the attention of people who can effect change in the real world. Ethnicity is a significant factor in describing Hawaii’s peoples. But it is only one factor among many, one which we would hope would not preclude participation in the development and exchange of artistic ideas. We are attempting to encompass a variety of ethnic and other voices while moving toward some kind of ideal multicultural nation, of which Hawai‘i itself is a kind of model.  

Although a certain amount of idealism can indeed move a canon forward, an effort to “globalize” or pluralize difference is often a deflection of culpability. Chock, in this

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instance, tries to deflect institutional blame by saying simply that more
underprivileged and underrepresented writers should submit their work to Bamboo
Ridge, imploring his readers that “we need for everyone, over time, to trust our
[editorial] choices.”34 While this kind of argument makes sense on its own terms, and
while I agree wholeheartedly about the importance of Local literature, Chock’s essay
willfully ignores—or artfully sidesteps—a lot of the more tangible criticisms being
thrown at Bamboo Ridge in the mid-1990s. Chock’s argument succeeds as an attempt
to displace blame, but again puts the onus of increased representation on the very
people who are being excluded.

**Critical Tensions in the Works of Lois-Ann Yamanaka**

Some of Yamanaka’s earliest works, such as *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre* and *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers*, are widely considered among Hawaiʻi residents and academics to be foundational to Hawaiʻi’s Local canon for both thematic and formal reasons. Yamanaka’s unapologetic use of Hawaiian pidgin English in both of these texts and her repeatedly firm defenses of its linguistic value have aligned her well the 1990s tradition of Local Asian writers who see pidgin as historically, linguistically, and culturally important. Likewise, both of these texts offer a distinctly localized and linguistically-oriented look into the lives of young women in rural settings on the Big Island of Hawaiʻi. Yamanaka also worked closely with some Bamboo Ridge writers and editors as she worked on her first two novels,

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34 Chock, 25.
having maintained personal and professional relationships with their writers throughout her career.\textsuperscript{35}

It has been, in part, her relationships with the Bamboo Ridge writers and her place as an Asian American in the development of a growingly neocolonialist canon that have led to such harsh critiques of her representations of Filipinos and Hawaiians, particularly of the men of those ethnic groups. Candace Fujikane writes on the first poem in \textit{Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre}, titled “Kala Gave Me Anykine Advice Especially About Filipinos When I Moved to Pahala,” citing it as one of the poems most indicative of this problem. The book opens with the lines, “No whistle in the dark / or you call the Filipino man / from the old folks home across your house / who peek at you already from behind / the marungay tree” (15), as the narrator repeats the things that Kala told her about avoiding the gazes of sexual predators. On the implications of the text as a whole, Fujikane writes,

\begin{quote}
The price of the collection’s narrative ambiguity is one that its particular social critique cannot afford at this time: identifications of Felix as Filipino and Jimmyboy as Hawaiian can have the devastating effect of exacerbating discriminatory conditions for Filipino/a and Hawaiian communities struggling against racism in Hawai‘i.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

These problems, Fujikane writes, “are intensified by an interlocking problem involving the need for Hawai‘i publications, which have been dominated by local Japanese and Chinese writers and editors, to provide more literary space for Filipino/a and Hawaiian writers.”\textsuperscript{37} Yamanaka has written unforgiving and harshly stereotypical

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre} was published by Bamboo Ridge Press, and in the acknowledgements to \textit{Wild Meat}, Yamanaka thanks Eric Chock, Darrell Lum, and Wing Tek Lum, all BR-affiliated, along with the Bamboo Ridge study group.
\textsuperscript{36} Fujikane, 54.
\textsuperscript{37} Fujikane, 55.
portraits of Filipino men as sexual predators and of Hawaiian men as violent and abusive in several of her novels. Her work cannot be vindicated of this, and Yamanaka’s use of harmful racial stereotypes cannot be overlooked. Numerous Hawai‘i scholars including Fujikane have already written on this subject, and their analysis is comprehensive and important. These problematic racial codifications prove that interrogations of the local must always be examined with structures of power in mind.

Despite their strained relationship to ethnic stereotype, works like *Name Me Nobody* (1999) and *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* (1996) offer incredibly nuanced portraits of young female characters, developing mixed-race identity, critiques of capitalist development and the tourism industry, a distinct sense of place, and a vivid portrait of island life. Even by its end, *Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers* remains somewhat elusive. Although it is easy to say that the novel is constructed as a series of vignette chapters following the young Lovey Nariyoshi, her friends, and her family in 1970s Hilo, it is difficult to pinpoint a more concrete narrative. Yet that the novel has no clear focal point is precisely its goal; by remaining multifaceted, giving few indications of temporality, and giving equal valence to all the themes the novel explores – sexuality, death, race, class, place, the everyday – the novel can exist as so many different things at once. There is no way to interpret it, only many ways to try to fit the pieces together.

Yoon Sun Lee argues that *Wild Meat* is primarily an exploration of “the possibilities of time as intermediate duration.” She elaborates:

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38 Exemplary passages from my research are from Fujikane (52-56) and Morales (112-128).
Yamanaka’s novel can also be seen as a coming-of-age novel, or a novel of subject formation. But the sense of directed movement toward a singular identity is less compelling than the contingent discoveries of everyday duration that make themselves felt at every turn. From this aimless and intimate everyday time, there arises a different sense of identity as embedded in the worn, used, and ultimately eloquent surfaces of small and local things.40

And, in fact, many of Yamanaka’s works can fit into this structure – even *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theatre*, although its structure as a book of poems and its more multifaceted narration complicates this structure. Lee’s analysis of Yamanaka’s work thus focuses primarily on how local identity in these texts is rooted in very particular actions and behaviors which link Lovey more concretely to her surroundings as she asserts that “a kind of implicit identity emerges not by anticipating an end, searching for truth, or negating a false ideal, but simply through repeated association with what is at hand in everyday existence.”41

Yet despite that it is a central part of her argument, Lee’s discussion of Local identity in Hawai’i is largely oversimplified, glossing over many of the literary intentions of both Yamanaka herself and the Local canon in general. Interestingly, she argues that mainland Asian American writers were critical of Hawai’i’s Local literature for “showing insufficient political engagement,”42 yet fails to acknowledge that this literature was, by its very existence, an anti-establishment and inherently political act of reclamation. While Lee does believe that *Wild Meat* seeks to reassert how personal identity, history, and the everyday are all inextricably linked with one another and asserts that history is always present in a novel that focuses so heavily on

40 Lee, 154.
41 Lee, 158.
42 Lee, 157.
the quotidian, somehow this history of labor exploitation, race- and class-based discrimination, and American empire remains largely undiscussed, except in the commodity’s relation to capitalist American modernity. Lee’s critique also operates under the assumption that Hawai‘i is an inherent part of the United States. Although her discussion of commodity fetishes and objects of everyday use (166-168) is intriguing, the chapter’s analysis of Yamanaka’s work ultimately lacks recognition of Hawai‘i’s tenuous national status and history of American exploitation.

It is difficult to look at *Wild Meat* and say that it has no political valence, particularly when it comes to the novel’s heavy critique of the gatekeepers to the English language who deny pidgin’s legitimacy and deride those who speak it. In only the second chapter, titled “Obituary,” Yamanaka paints a harsh portrait of Lovey’s English teacher who believes that success can only come through the exclusive use of Standard English, and who belittles his students for being unable to meet his linguistic standards. Mr. Harvey’s words are always offset in italics throughout the chapter, as Yamanaka chooses to mark both him and his language (Standard English) as foreign and ultimately unwelcome. Lovey introduces him as their “worst teacher” (9) because of his endless tirades about a supposedly uneducated mode of speech, as she says:

Jerome looks at me and puts his middle finger on the desk to our worst teacher, because Mr. Harvey says for the fiftieth time this year:

“No one will want to give you a job. You sound uneducated. You will be looked down upon. You’re speaking a low-class form of good Standard English. Continue, and you’ll go nowhere in life. Listen, students, I’m telling you the truth like no one else will. Because they don’t know how to say it to you. I do. Speak Standard English. DO NOT speak pidgin. You will only be hurting yourselves.”

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43 Lee, 158.
I tell Jerry, “No make f-you finger to Mr. Harvey. We gotta try talk the way he say. No more dis and dat and wuz and cuz ’cause we only hurting ourselfs.” (9)

To some extent, Lovey does believe that Harvey’s words have value. Yet she continues:

I don’t tell anyone, not even Jerry, how ashamed I am of pidgin English. Ashamed of my mother and father, the food we eat, chicken luau with can spinach and tripe stew. The place we live, down the house lots in the Hicks Homes that all look alike except for the angle of the house from the street. The car we drive, my father’s brown Land Rover without the back window. The clothes we wear, sometimes we have to wear the same pants in the same week and the same shoes until it breaks. Don’t have no choice.

Ashamed of my aunties and uncles at baby luaus, yakudoshis, and mochi pounding parties. “Eh, bradda Larry, bring me one nada Primo, brah. One cold one fo’ real kine. I rey-day, I rey-day, no woray, brah. Uncap that sucka and come home to Uncle Stevie.” I love my Uncle Steven, though, and the Cracker Jacks he brings for me every time he visits my mother. One for me and one for my sister, Calhoon. But I’m so shame.

Ashame too of all my cousins, the way they talk and act dumb, like how they like Kikaida Man and “Ho, brah, you seen Kikaida Man kick Rainbow Man’s ass in front of Hon Sport at the Hilo Shopping Center? Ho, brah, and I betchu Godzilla kick King Kong’s ass too. Betchu ten dollars, brah, two fur balls kicking ass in downtown Metropolis, nah, downtown Hilo, brah.” […] And nobody looks or talks like a haole. Or eats like a haole. Nobody says nothing the way Mr. Harvey tells us to practice talking in class. (9-10)

Lovey’s shame about the way she talks is pervasive, and this passage exemplifies how this shame encompasses so many different aspects of difference she perceives between herself and others’ expectations of what or who she should be. She sees herself as foreign in her own home, linking her shame of pidgin English first to her family, then to their food, and then to place. These emblems of cultural belonging have somehow been twisted into objects of shame for this young girl, in part because of the English teacher who unrelentingly tells her that her speech is “terrible,” lamenting that “it’ll take us a goddamn lifetime” to make his students into “perfect
"little Americans" (12). As she speaks more about her shame, she begins to lapse into her own form of pidgin, dropping the final letter on “ashamed” to instead say that she is “ashame,” or “so shame,” as it is commonly expressed in local vernacular. Likewise, she laments that she has to share clothes with her little sister Calhoon simply out of necessity through a double negative by saying, “Don’t have no choice.” Lovey is ashamed of her class status, and this first paragraph links pidgin distinctly to class. Mr. Harvey himself solidifies this shame by telling his students that pidgin is “a low-class form of good Standard English,” and Lovey’s explanation of why she is so ashamed of pidgin English turns into a litany of how her clothes, food, family, possessions, race, and speech signify deficiency when measured against American expectations and standards.44

Lovey mentions race only briefly here, yet the local-haole dichotomy is exceptionally stratified in terms of both race and class, especially as it plays out in terms of language. Mr. Harvey represents a legion of white Americans (often men, but not always) who tout American Standard English as the only acceptable form of communication. His focus on Americanness and economic success links him directly to a group of people who most often did not grow up in the islands and do not know the history of pidgin’s formation.45 While Yamanaka does not make his personal history or racial identity explicit, Mr. Harvey reads unequivocally as a middle-aged white American man, new to Hawai‘i and its people and characterized by the typically harsh haole attitude of imposing American culture on his subjects. This

44 This lack is felt in many other places throughout the novel, such as the chapter entitled “I Wanna Marry a Haole So I Can Have A Haole Last Name” (20-29).
45 Pidgin formed as a system of communication in multiracial plantation communities in Hawai‘i starting in the early 1800s.
discourse of absence and inequity likewise folds into a discussion of the impact of U.S. empire in Hawai‘i, as standard English is seen as inherently foreign, placeless in Hawai‘i yet consistently enforced by condescending outsiders. Over the course of a mere few pages, Yamanaka has given her readers a complex view into the linguistic, racial, and national prejudices that color life in Hawai‘i on a daily basis, even for Hawai‘i’s children.

Not only is Yamanaka’s subject matter in this passage explicitly political, but so is her stylization of Lovey’s narrative voice. Although dialogue is recorded in her natural speaking voice, Lovey’s narrations are predominantly in standard English and often sound more mature than her natural speaking voice. This could suggest that she is retelling these stories from a significantly later point in her life, but Lovey consistently marks her narratives in the present moment, referencing “today” and “tonight” throughout her stories. As retrospect is no longer a valid explanation for the disparity between dialogue and narration, the reasoning behind this stylization becomes more opaque. If Lovey’s internal dialogue is in such poetic, well-constructed prose, we could ask ourselves why she does not simply say what seems to come to her mind so easily. But by showcasing her teacher’s harshness, Yamanaka implores us to ask ourselves why this would be the preferred linguistic form at all. Here, she reasserts pidgin’s importance—not only to Lovey but to Hawai‘i more broadly—by underscoring it as Lovey’s default mode of communication while simultaneously offering pointed criticisms of how U.S. empire has impacted language education in Hawai‘i. Lovey ends the chapter by saying:

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46 For examples, see Wild Meat, 82 and 89.
Sometimes I think that Mr. Harvey doesn’t mean to be mean to us. He really wants us to be Americans, like my kotonk cousins from Santa Ana, he’d probably think they talked real straight. But I can’t talk the way he wants me to. I cannot make it sound his way, unless I’m playing pretend-talk-haole. I can make my words straight, that’s pretty easy if I concentrate real hard. But the sound, the sound from my mouth, if I let it rip right out the lips, my words will always come out like home. (12-13)

Lovey initially focuses on what she sees as her inability to speak how she is expected to speak, seeing this as an inherently negative lack of skill. However, she soon says that “[talking] real straight” is easy, if she tries hard enough. Her inability to speak like a ‘perfect little American’ is thus not because of deficiency, but a lack of both desire and necessity to speak this way. This portion of Lovey’s narration, as a result of its informal and occasionally made-up diction, strays from standard English and suggests a more hybridized way of speaking and she relates pidgin’s value directly to her sense of belonging. For Lovey, standard English is a foreign tongue, distinctly haole and separated from the sense of home she feels in pidgin English. The chapter ends with Lovey’s ultimate refusal to apologize not only for the way she speaks, but also for the way she was brought up, the way her family lives, and her identity itself.

Additionally, Yamanaka’s depictions of multiraciality defy classification, as each of her mixed-race characters simultaneously typifies and breaks free from stereotypes about Hawai‘i’s ethnic mixtures. In Name Me Nobody, the story of a young Hilo girl’s reckoning with her best friend’s queer identity, mixed-race characters have clear self-conceptions of their racial identity, yet these do not seem to be particularly important in the grand scheme of the novel. Instead, Yamanaka focuses much more on the racial gaze from without, exploring how protagonist Emilou Kaya perceives and participates in this external inscription of racial identity.
Babes Hinano, the new girlfriend of Emi’s best friend Von, is hapa, with a Hawaiian father and a Japanese mother, while her cousin, Kyle Kiyabu, has a Japanese father and a white mother. On their mixed-race heritage, Babes says, “His father and my mother are brother and sister. His father married one haole. My mother married one Hawaiian. So we both hapa and beautiful, I guess” (27). The “hapa and beautiful” trope has existed in Hawai‘i literature from as early as Michener with the “Golden Man,” showing how Hawaiians and part-Hawaiians are often fetishized for their beauty. Yet neither Babes nor Kyle brings up their mixed-race identity again in the novel – it is mentioned only in passing at the start of the narrative, foregrounding these two characters in a pre-established trope. Emi-lou and Von are also mixed-race, both with Japanese mothers and Portuguese fathers.47 Their racial identities dismantle the American stereotype that “mixed-race” implies “mixed with white,” as only Kyle is part haole. In general, mixed-race identity seems to be mostly irrelevant to the characters’ daily lives, except in conflict.

Kyle Kiyabu fits well into the archetype of the stereotypical hapa haole beauty, a portrayal which conforms more to the beige multiracial ideal in the continental United States. Emi-lou introduces Kyle through a description of his physical appearance: “He’s the cutest thing you’ve ever seen with light ehu hair, light brown eyes, golden biceps, and no pimples on his face” (47). In large part because of his appearance, Emi-lou overlooks many of the violent aspects of his character until he attempts to rape her near the middle of the novel. His cruelty and misogyny complicate the idea of a harmonious beige or hapa haole future; by placing Kyle

47 While it is not confirmed, the novel implies that Emi-lou’s father is Jerry Rapoza, a Portuguese man her mother knows. See Chapter 34.
within this trope and then exposing him as a sexual predator, Yamanaka dismantles the common stereotype that mixed-race figures are emblems of the hope of the future. Throughout the novel, Yamanaka links race not only to popularity and social order but also to intelligence, exposing many of the harsher ways in which racial stereotypes imposed from without impact both Emi-lou’s and Von’s self-esteem. Emi-lou’s low self-confidence originates in large part from her body, as she is frequently teased for being fat and pale. Her consistent struggles with her body image and social reputation throughout the novel are proof of the personal hardships that these stereotypes of beauty, codified in outward (mixed) racial appearance, can have on someone who sees themselves as racially “other.” For example, Emi compares her skin to Von’s, “naturally tanned,” while she is “white like a haole” (32), evoking the racialized stigma that comes with being pale or light-skinned in Hawai’i as one of the reasons that she sees herself as unworthy. Explicating another set of stereotypes, Von’s Portuguese father constantly calls attention to how her Portuguese side makes her “half-dumb.” Emi and Von’s softball coach, for example, is friends with Uncle Charlie, and both of them equate Portuguese identity with ugliness and stupidity while equating Japanese identity with intelligence. On the day of their first practice, Coach Kaaina says to Uncle Charlie, “[Let] me see – which one of these two is your daughter? Has to be this one, the one who look Portagee like you. You lucky that stuck-up Japanee girl married you, you ugly Portagee, you. What her name? Suka? Etsuki? Her name no matter – at least now, your girl half-smart” (17). In turn, Von internalizes this narrative, asking Emi-lou during practice, “You think you can beat

48 Lighter skin often signifies a haole whiteness or a disconnect from the culture in Hawai`i that promotes frequent beach-going and nicely tanned skin.
this half-dumb Portagee to that stop sign, or what?” (38). Even her father can only express pride in the form of incredulity that his half-Portuguese daughter could overcome the inherent stupidity that comes with being Portuguese. Emi-lou writes, “Von look like she feeling pretty good about herself, until Uncle Charlie says, ‘And to think, this kid of mind half-stupid like me, Pocho-power,’ he says, raising a clenched fist in the air. Von looks so sharp in her navy blazer with khaki pants till Uncle says that” (164). The adults are shown to be more prejudiced than the children in the novel, as it is the adults who first teach their children about racial prejudice because of the ways they have internalized it. Emi-lou is aware of how these prejudices have impacted Von’s self-esteem from an early point in the novel,49 but the children are not often given credit for this recognition.

In conclusion, Hawai‘i writers in the late twentieth century created some of the first reconfigurings of local identity after years of colonial erasure. However, these efforts to rehistoricize Hawai‘i and its people were unsatisfactory, often leaving Filipinos and Hawaiians out of the mix in favor of a more middle-class, Asian, post-plantation construction of identity. Lois-Ann Yamanaka, one of Hawai‘i’s most canonical and established writers, is herself not exempt from this criticism, as she has often portrayed Filipino and Hawaiian men in her earlier works as violent, abusive sexual predators. Yamanaka’s body of work exemplifies the complicated tension between narrative ambiguity and political consciousness that inhibited the Local literary movement in the 1980s and 1990s. Novels like Wild Meat and the Bully Burgers and Name Me Nobody address the complicated issues of multiculturalism,

49 “The Portuguese jokes here are like the Polish jokes I heard a comedian telling on TV. Von always thinks she’s the punchline” (18).
mixed-race identity, misogyny and patriarchy, tourism and economic development, and the difficulties of growing up in Hawaiʻi with notable finesse, yet ultimately reproduce harmful racially-coded stereotypes that detract from the literature’s potential for inclusivity and radical change. Yamanaka succeeds in using existing stereotypes about mixed-race beauty standards or school popularity in order to dismantle them, complicating prejudices from within by showing that Hawaiʻi and its people are far too multifaceted to be singularly categorized.

While her work cannot be singularly categorized, much of it remains deeply problematic with respect to perpetuating harmful racial stereotypes and representative of the problems with the Local canon at the turn of the millennium. Her work solidified many of the literary trends and tropes of her time, and the question remains whether her successors learned from the harms of Yamanaka’s stereotypical portrayals to write Filipinos and Native Hawaiians back into Local literature.
Chapter Three: Hawaiʻi’s Literature in the 21st Century

In the past five years alone, Hawaiʻi’s symbolic value in continental American discussions about multiraciality, national sovereignty, and land appropriation has grown immensely. After the election of Hawai‘i-born Barack Obama as president in 2008 and amidst a growing discussion about the appropriation of the Hawaiian word “hapa” by the American mixed-race community, Hawaiʻi has been propelled to the forefront of several national discussions about race and nation. Yet despite a growing cultural knowledge both within and outside of the islands of Native Hawaiian culture, history, lāhui, and language, discussions of Hawaiʻi’s multiculturalism have largely remained unchanged. Just this March, I read a self-professed biracial scholar write in the columns of the New York Times that Hawaiʻi “[seems] to naturally foster [a] mellower view of race” due to its racial diversity and large percentage of multiracial people. The author continues to say that people in Hawaiʻi simply “think differently about race,” all within his broader claim that multiracial people will essentially save

1 In January 2017, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg was widely criticized for attempting to buy Native Hawaiian-owned plots of land within his large estate on the island of Kaua’i while showing an evident lack of knowledge about Hawaiian estate practices. Zuckerberg is just one example of white American business executives owning large plots of land; tech billionaire Larry Ellison owns the entire island of Lānaʻi, while others like eBay founder Pierre Omidyar and several high-profile celebrities own land on the island of Maui.

2 Specifically, appropriation by part-Asian Americans.
America from its own racism. Likewise, Hawai‘i is still savagely dehistoricized in the travel writer’s quest for paradise. I felt as if I had found a more cynical, less sensationalist Michener as I read a *New York Times* travel writer’s essay, “The Hawaii Cure,” about his time on O‘ahu and the Big Island. Unable to divorce the postwar image of paradise from a place that did not ask to be the white man’s fantasy of Eden, the writer criticized what he saw as the crassness of Hawai‘i’s tourist industry without bothering to examine his own place in it, even offering that he wished Hawai‘i were more isolated so that he would not have to hear about the current state of U.S. affairs.

However, white American residents in Hawai‘i still often complain about its racism, and recent debate over the use of the word haole disproves this idea of softened racial boundaries. In 1990, a white American student at the University of Hawai‘i likened “haole” to a racial slur in an op-ed in the UH student paper. Hawaiian Studies professor and sovereignty activist Haunani-Kay Trask responded with her own piece, titled “Haole go home,” in which she told the student that he could very well leave Hawai‘i if he were too fragile to hear a word that reminded him of his imperialist heritage.

Yet where does this leave Hawai‘i and its artists? While the islands remain caught between racist caricature and eroticist idealization, with their people still

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3 The author mentions neither the effects of U.S. imperialism on racial politics in Hawai‘i nor the idea that much of Hawai‘i’s “welcoming” nature has much to owe to Native Hawaiian culture. Subsequent responses to this piece likewise did not contest the author’s depiction of the islands’ racial climate or erasure of Native Hawaiian history.
5 Rohrer, 61. See Chapter 3 for full discussion of public debate in Hawai‘i about the word.
tokenized or simply absent in mainstream American media, debates concerning the “true” nature of Hawai‘i’s racial climate have become considerably more charged within the past ten years. On one side of this debate is the discourse of racial harmony, reiterating the rhetoric of a multicultural paradise often in order to prove Hawai‘i’s educational or symbolic value to the U.S. On the other side is the discourse of racial conflict, in which Hawai‘i is portrayed as far more “racist” than the rest of America because its people are openly critical of white people and often reject whiteness in most of its social, cultural, and linguistic forms. As a result, Hawai‘i’s literature too is caught in the middle of this divisively binary argument within the islands about which narratives can be considered authentic or accurate.

As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, Hawai‘i’s writers of Asian descent played no small part in reconfiguring Hawai‘i’s symbolic value to the United States, but they did so in a way that replicated some of the problems they set out to dismantle. In asserting their stories and identities so loudly as a more authentic version of life in Hawai‘i, they failed to acknowledge the other, equally authentic narratives still waiting to be heard. Now, in the 2000s, Hawai‘i’s writers continue to grapple with the neocolonialist history of their institutional canon. Although the founders of Hawai‘i’s Local literature movement opened the doors for a broader discussion about racial stereotypes, literary and visual representation, and (re)writing history moving into the 21st century, the field does not seem to have progressed past its origins. Hawai‘i’s writers are still struggling to dismantle utopic multiculturalism and more effectively

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6 See also Cameron Crowe’s 2015 rom-com Aloha, in which a white mainland actress with no ties whatsoever to Hawai‘i was cast in the role of a hapa character.  
7 See Rohrer, pp. 63-69 and 69-74 (Chapter 3).
include Native Hawaiians, Filipinos, and members of other marginalized ethnic
groups, I would argue largely due to a lack of public reckoning with the issues of
Asian settler colonialism and Kānaka claims to sovereignty and ʻāina.

For this chapter, I have chosen to examine two novels, both published after
2010, which are emblems of both the progress the Local literary genre has made in
the 21st century and the problems it still has yet to overcome. The first, Tyler
Miranda’s ‘Ewa Which Way, is a formulaically Local Hawaiʻi novel, a bildungsroman
about the struggles of two Portuguese boys growing up in rural ʻEwa Beach in the
1970s. The second, Kaui Hart Hemmings’s Juniors, focuses predominantly on
Honolulu and its most affluent residents, occasionally enlisting the countryside in
postcard snapshot form as an attempt to incorporate an image of Hawaiʻi that is
supposedly more authentic and multicultural. While I believe Miranda’s novel is a
beautiful testament to the struggles of displacement, loss, and resilience, I am less
inclined to give Hemmings’s work about the privileged the same praise. Yet both
novels are indicative of the current problem facing Hawaiʻi’s Local literary canon–
either a work is mired in the conventions of the past, or it attempts to create a newer,
shiner narrative of Hawaiʻi only to reproduce many of the same naively idealistic
representations of multiculturalism which have proven problematic since the time of
James Michener.

**The Revivification of the 1990s Hawaiʻi Novel in ‘Ewa Which Way**

Various excerpts of critical commentary and praise preface Tyler Miranda’s
debut novel, the very first line of which upon opening the cover is from Craig Howes,
explicitly placing the novel within an established tradition: “ʻEwa Which Way is an important addition to ‘the other side of Hawaiʻi’ fiction that has flourished over the past twenty years, joining the compelling novels, short stories, and non-fiction of Lois-Ann Yamanaka, R. Zamora Linmark, Chris McKinney, […] and many others.” Yet he paradoxically ends by grounding the novel in the present, writing that it is “an honest, carefully crafted, powerful, and unforgettable novel of Hawaiʻi today.” Published in 2013, ʻEwa Which Way is caught between this tension of past and present, looking toward the forms and motifs of the past in a time when the future is at the heart of national discussions about Hawaiʻi and the Hawaiian nation.

Without knowing in what year ʻEwa Which Way was published, an analysis of its form and structure places it firmly within the established traditions of the Local Hawaiʻi literary canon. The 2013 novel successfully incorporates all elements present in the typical Hawaiʻi bildungsroman, as discussed in Chapter Two: a rural or underdeveloped setting that is often criticized by several of the characters, but is ultimately seen as crucial to their identities; a temporal setting explicitly fixed in the late twentieth century; chapters in the form of vignette episodes; thematic concerns about the belittlement of Pidgin English; a strict dichotomy between the rural (country) and the urban (“town”), in terms of both people and landscape; and a young, precocious protagonist who speaks Pidgin in dialogue but narrates the novel from retrospect in well-constructed standard English prose.

The novel, set specifically in 1982-83, focuses on 12-year-old Landon and 8-year-old Luke DeSilva, who have just moved with their mother and father from an outer region of Honolulu to ʻEwa Beach on the south coast of Oʻahu. As the novel’s
first-person narrator, Landon recounts the events from his sixth grade year that led him through his parents’ failing marriage, an abusive home environment, and his struggles to protect his little brother. Three short paragraphs in italics, written clearly from Landon’s adult perspective, preface the novel. Here, Landon reflects on the state of childhood and the childlike desire to seek freedom from one’s problems by running away before telling us that he “was twelve when [he] first considered suicide.” Landon’s suicide attempt frames the novel, as it ends with his decision to live as he “re-entered the storm” (298).

Above all, Landon’s parents are the biggest sources of racial conflict and confusion in the novel and the vehicle through which most of the novel’s discussions about race are enacted. Although all the DeSilvas are ethnically Portuguese, Landon’s mother Minerva has rejected many of her family’s cultural practices and is repeatedly accused by her husband Leonard of trying to be haole. At a very early point in the novel, as Minerva is taking what Leonard sees as too long to get ready for a family outing, he tells her, “No matter how much powder you slap on, your face not going be white like one haole” (12). On the other hand, Minerva often criticizes her husband for what she sees as “low-class” behavior – namely, speaking predominantly in Pidgin – and her frustrations with him are often transferred onto her children. When Landon uses a Pidgin form of “Portuguese,” she quickly retorts, “How many times do I have to tell you, Landon? We’re Portuguese, not Portagee. You sound so low-class when you speak like that” (16).

8 ‘Ewa Which Way, no page number.
Minerva’s constant rejection of Pidgin as a legitimate way to communicate weighs heavily on both Landon and Luke throughout the novel. After the brothers’ open house night, Minerva “[raves] about” (45) Mrs. Shelley, Luke’s haole teacher, but complains about Mrs. Kato, Landon’s local Japanese teacher, on the way home. When Landon asks why she had been speaking in relatively familiar Pidgin with Mrs. Kato in the classroom if she didn’t approve of her language, she counters:

“You think I don’t know how fo’ talk? I grew up on this island too. I know how to speak pidgin. I just choose not to.” Mom snorted. “I know the proper time and place, Landon. Something you and your brother don’t.” (45)

Although the open house scene shows that Minerva can code-switch easily between Pidgin and standard English, her immense disdain for the colloquial vernacular comes from her sense of propriety in public spaces and her obsessive concern with the relative appropriateness of her appearance. She believes Pidgin to be improper or “low-class” and thus unacceptable in most circumstances, apparently particularly in school. Landon, confused and angered by his mother’s inconsistent behavior, reciprocates with his own argument:

Mom was so . . . fake. And to someone nice like Mrs. Kato. But on the other hand, Mom was nice to someone fake like Mrs. Shelley. Suddenly, something dawned on me, and it made me sick. “So it’s okay if you talk pidgin, even if you Portuguese?”

Mom was halfway out the car. She turned back and scrutinized me. “For your information,” she said shortly, “when I do speak pidgin, it’s to help others who speak pidgin understand better.” She slammed the door. (45)

The racial component of this scene is particularly striking, as it incorporates much of the racist dialogue about Pidgin’s propriety in daily life. As Hawaiian Pidgin was created among field workers on the plantations, it is widely conceived that most of the people who speak it come from lower-class or working-class backgrounds.
Minerva’s personal rejection of Pidgin has much to do with the way she was brought up, in a devoutly Catholic family in a region of Honolulu. Although her parents die before Landon is born, their final letter to Minerva shows that they were just as concerned with linguistic and social propriety as she would become later in her life. Likewise, the novel suggests that Minerva’s skin tone is far lighter than that of Landon or his father, and that Luke was born with far lighter skin than Landon. However, she is equally harsh to both of her sons, primarily for their use of Pidgin, which in turn makes them more similar to their “brownie father” (253). Thus, Minerva’s rejection of Pidgin is as much related to class as it is related to race, but all are intertwined in her strict adherence to what she believes is socially acceptable. In this case, it is whiteness, affluence, and pleasant insincerity that comprise Minerva’s code of social conduct.

Minerva’s constant linguistic policing is both a source and result of her frustrations with her husband Leonard, whose Pidgin speech is far thicker than their children’s. In response to Minerva’s belief that “lazy tongues [should be] corrected” (51), Leonard consistently lashes out at his wife for all the “haole shit fo’ deal wit’ at home” (52). In a period of relative calm after months of fighting, Leonard tells Landon the story of how he and Minerva met, trying to caution his son from repeating what he believes were his mistakes. He explains that although he learned to tolerate

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9 Although I will not discuss Minerva’s Catholicism in depth here, her religious upbringing is a central facet of the novel. It is because of her Catholicism that she marries Leonard upon learning that she was pregnant with Landon, rather than get an abortion, which would be seen as an unforgivable sin. Landon’s discovery of this fact leads him to blame himself for his parents’ failing marriage.
this kind of discomfort after a while, in the early days of their relationship something felt off:

[It] was da way your modda talk. She sound so fricken haole, make me sick. She make me feel stupid. Like she betta dan me, like ev’ry odda haole I eva met. By da time we reach Tantalus, she wen’ correck da way I talk seven times. (179)

Leonard’s sense of disempowerment in this relationship is clear here. Minerva alienates her husband from the earliest days of their relationship because of her linguistic adherence to whiteness, which contrasts with Leonard’s adherence to a mode of speech that is distinctly racialized.

Ultimately, the novel’s discussion of the widespread stigma against Pidgin English as a legitimate and socially acceptable form of communication does not add anything new to what Local novels have already revealed. Lois-Ann Yamanaka made this point with Mr. Harvey in Wild Meat, and Minerva’s belittlement of her own children is different only in that it has moved into the family realm, causing rifts between her and her husband as well as her children. Pidgin here is not something that binds a family together, but something which holds immensely divisive power.

However, one new thing that moves the novel beyond the Local canon’s discussion of race in Hawai‘i is that it focuses on a Portuguese family rather than a family of east Asian descent, raising a more interesting discussion on colorism and privilege. Portuguese families in Hawai‘i came from a place of relative privilege in some cases, as white-passing Portuguese people could often become lunas on plantations simply because of their skin tone.\(^{10}\) However, Portuguese people have a wide variety of skin tones, as evidenced by the descriptions of the DeSilva family in

\(^{10}\) See Ronald Takaki, Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawaii, 1835-1920.
the novel, meaning that the novel more explicitly explores the relationship between skin tone, cultural/perceived whiteness, class, and race. For Luke, who is lighter-skinned like his mother, his appearance leads him to be teased at school as a “haole boy” (18), as not belonging, which confuses and upset him deeply. Yet for Minerva, whiteness is something to aspire to, although it widens the rift between her and her husband.

Additionally, the novel’s characterizations of other ethnic groups, although relatively sparse, are very much in line with the preexisting Local canon. This could have something to do with the novel still being set in the 1980s; perhaps Miranda was attempting only to represent Hawai‘i’s racial climate in a distinct moment and nothing more. Nevertheless, the novel’s portrayal of its Filipino and of hapa characters falls more often into stereotype than into nuanced portrait. Landon, for example, uses a description of his Filipino neighbors’ house in order to tease Luke about his house made of Legos:


Although Landon is not necessarily trying to be malicious in characterizing the Peralta’s house this way, it is one of only a few explicit references to Filipino identity in the book and it is used in this way to set an example of something so ugly to the

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11 “Ev’ry day, da same ting: ‘Haole Boy, gimme your lunch money,’ or ‘Haole Boy, no look at me li’dat. I going broke your white ass,’ or ‘Tink you so smart, ah, Haole Boy, wit’ da nice clothes? Answer all da time. Like make us look stupid, ah?’ [...] It no even matter I Portagee just like Darren.” (18)

12 i.e. part-Hawaiian. The word will only be used with this definition throughout this thesis.
point of being laughably gaudy and undesirable. Furthermore, the novel’s only
individually identifiable Filipino character, Boris Puinip, appears only in one scene,
when Landon’s class is playing flag football during P.E. at school. Landon describes
the “small Filipino boy” (66) in caricature:

Boris had a rice bowl haircut and wore a huge wooden cross that hung from
twine around his neck. He always wore long black pants and a thin, long-
sleeved, white shirt. Boris could run like hell, but since he was so small, he
couldn’t hold onto the ball to save his life. (66)

This image of Boris is far different from the disparaging image of Filipino men that
Lois-Ann Yamanaka was criticized for in the 1990s, predominantly due to the fact
that Boris is still young. He is not malicious or a sexual predator, simply a small boy
who can “run like hell.” Yet regardless of whether or not this description was
intended as a caricature, Boris’s place as the only individual Filipino character – aside
from the Peraltas, who are described only through their house – and the fact that his
race is explicitly mentioned position him as the unlucky representative of his entire
ethnicity.

Additionally, the novel’s depiction of Vicky Lau, Landon’s love interest and
one of only two hapa characters,13 falls within the same tropes of the so-called golden
beauty to the point of exoticizing her, as many narratives of hapa identity tend to do.
As Landon’s first-ever girlfriend in a time when things are confusing at home, it
makes sense that a 12-year-old boy would focus on his crush’s looks. Vicky, the part-

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13 Toby Kaʻea, one of Landon’s closest friends, is part-Hawaiian and part-Japanese and the other
hapa character in the novel. While Toby’s character is far more nuanced than Vicky’s, his
racial identity is neither directly commented on nor does it seem to have any influence on his
daily life, except when he makes fun of Jason Jones, the new haole kid in class. However,
Toby’s presence in the novel is short, as he disappears from Landon’s life midway through
the novel and is revealed to have died near the end.
Chinese and part-Hawaiian girl in Landon’s old class, has “Eyes like the sun, exploding with light, Hair like seaweed, flowing underwater” (258). Yet her role in the novel is mostly as a plot device; Vicky’s eventual presence as Landon’s girlfriend is the catalyst for his final fight with his mother, which leads him to attempt suicide. She has no value other than her looks and her persistent interest in Landon despite his self-doubt, serving almost as the manic pixie dreamgirl of the novel. He projects his desires for romantic and familial security onto her, talking repeatedly about how this relationship served as a place where he “could still have everything [he] wanted” (284). Because such a young character narrates the novel, it is difficult to tell how much of this has explicitly to do with Landon’s perceptions of race. However, just as with Boris Puinip, Vicky’s portrayal exists without much to compare it to such that it forces her to become a symbol of feminine hapa identity.

Although it is difficult to criticize such a touching novel as formally unoriginal, ‘Ewa Which Way is limited precisely by its form as a retrospective bildungsroman and its adherence to themes discussed already at length in the late twentieth century to add anything strikingly new to the discourse about race in Hawai‘i or to Hawai‘i’s literature as a whole. Its structure, themes, and concept all make clear reference and reverence to the established modes of the Local literary canon. The coming-of-age novel form in particular has kept racial characterizations within ‘Ewa Which Way from adopting more of the nuance necessary to move the genre of Hawai‘i literature past explorations of childish racially-based teasing and crushes on the hapa girl. However, the same is true even for the adults in the novel; that Landon’s parents’ racial and cultural differences are at the core of the story only
enforces the idea that Hawai‘i is mired in racial prejudice. Ultimately, the novel offers a narrative about racialization in Hawai‘i’s multicultural environment that is not much different from what has existed since the late twentieth century.

**The Dangerous Multiculturalist Logic of Kaui Hart Hemmings’ *Juniors***

Hawai‘i-born author Kaui Hart Hemmings broke out onto the national stage in large part because of *The Descendants*, a 2011 film based on her 2007 book by the same name. Featuring a hapa protagonist and in some ways setting the precedent for part-Hawaiian characters in American movies to be played by white actors, Hemmings’s written work has been criticized in some Hawai‘i circles for paying too much attention to the rich, mostly white residents of Honolulu, yet her novels have been well-received in the United States for their perceived authenticity.\(^\text{14}\) Her 2015 young-adult novel *Juniors* fits into this mold, and offers a drastically different view of life in Hawai‘i than Miranda’s novel because of its focus on the escapades of wealthy teenage private school kids in twenty-first century Honolulu.

With these differences in mind, questioning the narrative’s authenticity perhaps distracts from the more important question of how justified her representations of Hawai‘i’s multiculturalism and of Native Hawaiian culture are. *Juniors* is a relatively accurate depiction of what life can be like for the affluent in

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\(^{14}\)“‘With her book *The Descendants*, Kaui Hart Hemmings put the lie to mainland Americans’ postcard image of Hawaii by allowing tragedy and, more insidiously, the mundane to run amok in paradise. She described singularly beautiful and exotic islands populated by people both defined by and inured to beauty and exoticism. In short, she created a portrait of the Hawaii where she grew up and where she lives, the Hawaii where Hollywood found her.” (Andrew Burmon, “‘The Descendants’ Author Kaui Hart Hemmings Talks Hawaii,” for the Huffington Post travel section in 2011.)
Hawai‘i. The senses of immense privilege that come from wealth, whiteness, and private school status are clear throughout the novel, and it is precisely that framework of privilege which makes the novel seem at times like a 2000s reconfiguring of Michener’s multicultural utopia.

Hemmings’s view of Hawai‘i in *Juniors* is arguably still a “postcard image,” adopting enough multiculturalist rhetoric to make the novel plausible while simultaneously putting it in the voice of a U.S.-born protagonist who is new to Hawai‘i but too quickly appoints herself to the role of tour guide to her audience. Although the events of the novel take place distinctly in the 2010s, Hemmings’s future- or at least present-oriented narrative is more regressive than Miranda’s novel because of the dubious ways in which it has configured Hawaiian identity and multiculturalism into the plot of the story.

*Juniors* follows Lea Lane, a part-Hawaiian teen about to start her junior year at Punahou School in Honolulu. Yet Lea is not a local – although her mother grew up in Hawai‘i, Lea was born in San Francisco and had lived there for her whole life until this point. At first, Lea and her mother live in Enchanted Lakes, an out-of-the-way town on the east side of O‘ahu, until the mother’s wealthy childhood friend invites them to live in a guesthouse on her family’s Kāhala estate. It is through her relationships with these characters, the Wests – Whitney, Will, and their parents – that Lea discovers a vague new sense of identity and personal autonomy.

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15 See previous footnote.
16 Although Hemmings makes no explicit reference to the year in which the novel takes place, various references to current events indicate a period of time before 2013.
Several thematic aspects of the novel were relatively predictable and therefore underwhelming simply due to the novel’s adherence to several genre conventions of young-adult fiction. *Juniors* is, essentially, the story of a young teen from the mainland moving to Hawai‘i, trying to start a new life and figure herself out in the process. The novel’s intense fixation on appearances, social image, and identity manifests itself in discussions of Lea being haole and not fitting in, Lea’s exotification of hapa and local people (primarily men), and a casual examination into television’s role in shaping Hawai‘i’s image. In encountering a new place at such a crucial stage in her life, however, Lea stumbles over many of the nuances of Hawai‘i’s history and racial politics as she tries to scrape out a sense of belonging wherever possible. She defies her haoleness and subsequently attempts to claim indigeneity while making a series of strangely offhanded yet broadly overgeneralizing comments about the islands and their people.

Lea is often questioned by her childhood friend, Danny, and others about her haole status and her resulting ability to “belong” in Hawai‘i. Much of the novel’s insensitive racial politics comes from Lea’s status as a part-Hawaiian by blood but ultimately non-local resident and her subsequent struggles with claiming Hawai‘i and Hawaiian-ness as part of her identity. By “blood,” Lea is one-eighth Hawaiian from her mother’s side. She was not raised with any particularly Hawaiian customs nor was

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17 He calls her “too haole” (181) to go to Waimea Bay by herself. She responds in painfully forced Pidgin, which Danny says “made King Kamehameha roll in his grave” (181).

18 The issue of defining Native Hawaiian identity by blood quantum is incredibly fraught and goes against many of the ways that Kānaka Maoli conceive of their own identities. The Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1921 defined “Native Hawaiian” as anyone with 50% Native Hawaiian ‘blood,’ in defiance of Hawaiian conceptions of genealogy. For more, see J. Kēhāulani Kauanui, “‘For Get’ Hawaiian Entitlement: Configurations of Land, ‘Blood,’ and Americanization in the HHCA of 1921” (1999).
she raised in Hawai‘i at all – not having grown up in this kind of environment, she is adjusting to it for the first time after having lived her life predominantly as an American. Over the course of the novel, as she searches for a sense of rootedness in a relatively unfamiliar place, Lea uses her own blood quantum in order to prematurely claim a sort of Native Hawaiian identity that supplements her sense of belonging, all while she mostly ignores both the issue of Native Hawaiian sovereignty and the world of privilege which she inhabits. As a result, her commentary on life in Hawai‘i is universalizing and oversimplified, and Hemmings does not invite us to think critically about the novel’s pedantic multiculturalism.

In the first moments after the Lanes move to Kāhala, Lea is filled with a sort of “excitement and undue pride, like [she is] a better person for living here” (27), but as she is swept up in the West teens’ wealthy party lifestyle, she becomes more disillusioned with the ways in which their intense focus on social image and their ability to maintain it through their wealth. The novel ends ambivalently with Lea’s sense of optimism for personal growth as she finishes her junior year, but it is precisely this lack of growth that makes Lea’s strange racial commentary throughout the novel more troubling.

After having lived in Kāhala for a few months, Lea returns with Whitney to Kailua where she had lived with her mother for the summer. She narrates:

We get to the entrance of Kailua town, and again I’m warmed by its familiarity, the way I feel an ownership over it, despite not having lived here that long. But my grandparents did, so that counts. Even though I didn’t grow

19 “As a junior, I’ve always felt we were on the cusp of something so much better, but maybe this is the stronger state. Juniors are so observant. We see how the leaders act and note what we’ll do differently. We watch our so-called superiors, then do it better. It’s kind of a good thing to take away—keeping yourself always on the verge of something, ready to reign while knowing that not everything gets left behind.” (312)
up here, I feel I’ve grown from them, like I’m something indigenous and not a Norfolk pine. (200)

Part of Lea’s sense of “ownership” could come simply by association, as she is taking Whitney, someone relatively unfamiliar with Kailua, through a place she already knows. Yet she quickly moves to call herself “something indigenous” because of her familial ties to Kailua, as if citing a long-standing natural and historical claim to this place. Yet it is unclear what claims to indigeneity Lea has other than blood itself. She lives in Enchanted Lakes for two or three months – certainly enough time to establish quotidian routines and a specific relationship with a place – yet by describing herself as “something indigenous,” she erases the far more historically vexed relationship that Native Hawaiians have to land (ʻāina) and place in the wake of U.S. imperialism. Native Hawaiians trace their genealogy to Papa (the earth mother) and Wākea (the sky father), making their relationship to land a distinctly genealogical one. Kinship as achieved through a common relationship to (stolen) land is at the core of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, and Lea fails to understand the depths of this importance, seeming to take part more in settler colonialism than becoming kamaʻāina.

20 Whitney even calls it Lea’s “‘hood” (200).
21 Hemmings’s choice of Kailua as Lea’s first encounter with Hawaiʻi is interesting, as Kailua has become over the past ten years far more of a tourist hotspot and wealthy white neighborhood (especially in Kailua town and Lanikai).
22 Judy Rohrer explains that the transformation of ʻāina into land and the denial of the Kumulipo through western science is another process of colonization (14-15).
23 I use “kamaʻāina” here in terms of both its colloquial definition (“local,” regardless of ethnicity) and its true Hawaiian definition (“child of the land,” explicitly Native Hawaiian). See glossary.
Native Hawaiians and the sovereignty movement itself, although very active in the early 2010s, only appear in flashes throughout the novel, yet Lea speaks repeatedly to what the generic “people of Hawai‘i” think, decoding local practices to a presumably clueless American audience. The purpose these strange explanations serve is unclear. As the words and phrases she chooses to define are all common knowledge, a reader from Hawai‘i would not need any of these linguistic footnotes to understand the novel; they might be more disruptive than engaging. At the same time, however, I do not think these kinds of explainer paragraphs are necessary for an American reader either; there are enough context clues for an American reader to at least guess at what some of these words and phrases mean, but Hemmings (through Lea) does not seem to have much faith in her readers’ ability to make their own critical assessments about the novel. Regardless, these moments in which Lea steps out of her narrative to decipher Hawai‘i to her audience prove that the novel’s audience is predominantly not one of Hawai‘i itself. Similarly to Hawaii, Juniors serves the purpose of touristic voyeurism, acknowledging racial tensions and explaining them in minor detail, but ultimately ending with a sentimental episode of acceptance that erases colonial history. Through Lea, Hemmings is inscribing this image of Hawai‘i primarily to young Americans, lending the novel a kind of sensationalist exhibitionism and showmanship.

24 Activists and politicians have discussed the future of a Hawaiian nation since 2000 with the first introduction of the Akaka Bill (Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act) and a Native Hawaiian registry. In 2014, the U.S. Department of the Interior began to discuss U.S. recognition of a Native Hawaiian government, which led to the creation of Na‘i Aupuni, an independent organization for self-determination. See <http://www.naiapuni.org/about.html>.

25 This could have to do with the fact that Juniors is marketed as young adult fiction, but that aspect makes it more condescending and problematic.
In explaining the definition of the word “local,” for example, Lea narrates: “Funny how people use that word here—local. It doesn’t always refer to the people who live here, because then we’d all be locals. Sometimes it means people who talk pidgin. People who don’t go to private schools, people who live in Waimanalo” (64). The colloquial definition of “local” is indeed in flux in Hawai‘i, but this explanation, like the others, is abruptly placed and seems rather disconnected from the rest of the story.  

This digression does make clear, however, that Lea does not consider herself a “local” given her newness to the islands. She even disparages certain local customs, like taking off one’s shoes inside the home. She mistakenly calls it a “Hawaiian custom” (102), conflating local with Hawaiian, and then compares people with bare feet to “monkeys dining at a table, our bare feet gripping the chair legs. Yuck” (102). These moments of didacticism show that Lea is quick to judge Hawai‘i and its people, and subsequently to use those judgments as the basis for her educational authority in the novel.

As an example of how quick judgments and descriptions can be harmful to entire groups of people, Lea’s fleeting descriptions of Native Hawaiians are both the most out of place in the novel and the most disheartening. There are only two explicit references to Native Hawaiian life in the novel: the first, when Lea goes to pick up Danny in Waimānalo, which is home to both sovereign and non-sovereign Hawaiian communities; and second, when the two briefly reference a 2006-2013 failed Native

26 Another example: “These are expressions everyone around here uses when something pleases them. ‘Chee’ is said enthusiastically; ‘shaddup,’ dryly and in response to something that looks good, like a pizza or a girl. ‘Shoots’ means ‘okay, let’s do it.’” (182)

27 To my knowledge, leaving one’s shoes at the door before entering the home is originally a Japanese custom, brought to the islands by Japanese plantation workers. The custom is now locally embraced, but whether this custom was also Native Hawaiian is still unknown to me.
Hawaiian resettlement effort into Kāhala. Both instances link Native Hawaiian life directly to material decay, and it is unclear whether these moments are supposed to be thought-provoking or simply part of the setting. On her drive through Waimānalo, she places the town’s residents in opposition to a sense of environmental splendor:

“We trail a truck with a bunch of shirtless kids in the back. The truck is stenciled with a sexy woman and a tribute to a dead musician. The bulk of the land in Waimanalo belongs to Hawaiian homeland, so most of the residents are Hawaiian. It is definitely not the same here as it is in Kahala, though the landscape—its vibrant colors and defiant mountains—make it so much more beautiful and complex. That ocean is the most beautiful blue, like jewels underwater.” (24)

Lea does not take the time to explain what those complexities could be. Likewise, the contrast between Kāhala and Waimānalo is limited in this section only to landscape, ignoring the socioeconomic differences between the two areas’ residents. Likewise, it is interesting that Lea will take the time in her narration to explain what “local” means, but not to explain what a Hawaiian homeland actually is. The disparity between the above image of Waimānalo and a description of Danny’s neighbors’ house only a page later is striking, as she writes, “Their next-door neighbors fly a Hawaiian flag and a sign that says DEFEND HAWAI.  There’s a skeleton of a Toyota in their yard that’s been there for as long as I can remember, as well as a pop-up tent and rusted baby toys” (25). Here, Lea focuses on the material decrepitude of a predominantly Native Hawaiian neighborhood. Her mention of the Hawaiian flag and

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28 It is troubling to note that Hemmings does not include Hawaiian diacritical markings in place names. In fact, Hawai‘i is consistently spelled as “Hawaii,” and in one instance when an ‘okina is included, it is written incorrectly as an apostrophe (“Ko’olaus,” 20).
29 “Defend Hawaii” is a popular local clothing brand. One of its logos controversially features an assault rifle, but the brand’s mission statement asserts that it “is not meant to provoke violence, but rather figuratively suggest protection by the highest means. We’re here to plant the proverbial seed, initiate a positive thought process. To Defend Hawaii, is to Defend Aloha” (from <http://www.defendhawaii.com/blog/about/>).
the Defend Hawai‘i sign explicitly denote this family as a Native Hawaiian family, and these kinds of yard displays are not uncommon in Hawai‘i. Yet similarly to the Peraltas in ‘Ewa Which Way, these Hawaiians do not exist as people in the novel but are literally configured into setting and backdrop, represented only by their possessions which have fallen into disrepair over the course of several years. This kind of representation continues later in the novel as Lea and Danny drive down Kāhala Avenue:

I laugh at the reference to the Japanese billionaire who bought more than two dozen properties along Kahala Avenue and invited native Hawaiian families to move in free of charge. Walls have been tagged with spray paint, pools filled with garbage, beer cans, even needles. Tennis courts are cracked and crumbling. He put marble statues around the properties and landscaped with rows of loud and busy plants and flowers. The homes look apocalyptic, like the remains of a once-grand society. (70)

This description is far more explicit in its reference to apocalyptic ruin, yet it is unclear what Lea means when she refers to the “once-grand society.” Is this the society of Native Hawaiians, or is it the society of rich (white) Kāhala residents? Given the imagery of yards full of marble statues and the connotation that the arrival of Hawaiians in these homes ruined their value, Lea seems to be lamenting the loss of the avenue’s symbolic display of western-style affluence. Condemned by the mark of the plural, these Native Hawaiians seem to be responsible for this material ruin yet again do not exist as individual characters, nor are they examined from within the context of historical disenfranchisement. In this way, Hawaiians are deprived of

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It was not actually rent “free of charge,” but from $100-$200 per month. Genshiro Kawamoto bought property in Kāhala in 2006 but eventually sold the properties to Alexander and Baldwin in 2013 after public controversy about the homes’ appearances. See “Kawamoto: Outrageous or sincere?” by Nina Wu, Honolulu Star-Bulletin 10/11/2006, and “Bye, Bye Genshiro Kawamoto – Hello Kahala Avenue Property Values” by Jaymes Song, Honolulu Magazine 5/12/2014.
individual agency throughout the novel and are relegated to being misunderstood and looked down upon by those more privileged.

Perhaps the most confusing moment in the novel is when Lea tries to grapple directly with the narrative of Hawai‘i’s multiculturalism. On a beach day, Lea observes a group of mainland tourists defer immediately to a group of locals who arrive at the spot. Seeing this, she then reflects on her own identity:

It’s funny that moments ago our group was practically a Hawaiian sovereign nation next to these haole boys, and now, in the newcomers’ presence, I don’t even feel like I live here. My Hawaiian blood cowers in some corner of my body, tucks itself into my spleen. The girls they’re with are wearing baggy soccer shorts and T-shirts, and look at us like we’ve insulted them without having said a word. One carries a cooler, which I’ve come to think of as a local’s accessory, like a watch, or no—something necessary—a wallet. In Hawaii we all give ourselves so much credit for being a melting pot, but I don’t think we melt—we just pick from one another’s cultures, then carry out the things we like best. (229-230)

In calling her self and her group of wealthy Asian friends “practically a Hawaiian sovereign nation,” even if just by comparison, Lea shows her immense naïveté when it comes to knowledge about and respect for the sovereignty movement. This simile is flippant and dismissive, erasing the nuances of local racial hierarchies in Hawai‘i simply so that Lea could say she was ‘more local than those guys.’ Although it is true that she is more local when compared to these white tourists, in no way does this justify how she has ripped the sovereignty movement of its politics and history in order to make a claim about her own belonging. Likewise, her discomfort in this moment – when locals arrive and begin to occupy the same space as Lea and her friends – ultimately shows that she is unable to let these people exist in a space that is arguably more theirs than hers. She recognizes this to a certain extent, as her “blood cowers” in deference, but she then goes on to examine the clothing and accessories of
the locals, again trying to decode their appearances to an outside audience. She perceives herself as an inside authority on Hawai‘i’s culture and people, even though she is unable to recognize the convoluted ways she has made herself into one. It is clear here that Lea does not find a true sense of belonging from her Hawaiian blood because she is actively fearful of a group of presumably Hawaiian locals. Lea uses her blood to justify her authority only when it is convenient, particularly around those who are not Hawaiian. In this instance, her choice to do so is questioned simply by locals taking up space in a world she believes should be her own.

Lea seems to embody her final statement about Hawai‘i’s melting pot myth: she herself has picked a Hawaiian identity that excludes nuanced and intelligent discussions of sovereignty and any more concrete aspects of Native Hawaiian culture. She inhabits a world that is predominantly white both at school and at home, and the affluence of her environment shrouds the very real socioeconomic disenfranchisement of Native Hawaiians that has occurred in the islands since the overthrow. Both of these instances show the aftereffects of that disenfranchisement without analyzing its causes, dehistoricizing Native Hawaiian and local Hawai‘i identity to the point of making it into caricature. While her initial observation – that “we all give ourselves so much credit for being a melting pot” – speaks to the illusion inherent in this narrative, she does not take this analysis further into her own way of thinking to examine the ways in which she has picked and chosen facets of life in Hawai‘i to make her own story. She does not question whether this is a good or ethical way to tell a story, only offers this relatively dismissive statement to describe the way things are. Lea’s trustworthiness as an authority on Hawai‘i and what its
people say is complicated by her lack of self-awareness about the exclusive ways she conceives of her own identity. Even if she is only a teenager, she is a teenage character written by an adult. If Hemmings intended for us not to take Lea as a reliable narrator, can her American readers be trusted to examine her descriptions of Hawai‘i with a critical eye?

Looking Forward

In the present moment, Hawai‘i is caught between its past and present, not sure which way is forward. It is fitting in this case, then, that Tyler Miranda offers the definitions of ‘ewa on the title page of his novel: not only does it refer to a specific place when capitalized and mark the direction of west, but it also means “crooked, out of shape, imperfect, ill-fitting.” While no one novel can be all-encompassing, totally dismantling the literary forms of the past and the harmful aspects of twentieth-century multiculturalist discourse about Hawai‘i, the problematic racial politics and formal limitations of both ‘Ewa Which Way and Juniors show how far the writers of Hawai‘i’s Local literary canon still have yet to come in terms of dismantling the criticism of its neocolonialism that arose in the 1990s. Both texts relegate Native Hawaiians and Filipinos to setting or an object of ridicule, reinscribing the racism of neocolonialist multicultural discourse. While ‘Ewa Which Way is set in a far more ethnically diverse and lower-middle-class environment than Juniors, which inhabits the world of wealthy white private school students, both texts manage to write marginalized ethnic groups out of the scene.

‘Ewa Which Way was clearly written for the people of Hawai‘i. No terms are glossed, no generalized statements about the people of Hawai‘i are made by any character, and Landon does not fashion himself into a cultural authority because there is simply no need to do so. The story simply happens to be set in a place whose history of multiculturalism has allowed the novel to raise questions about race, language, and class. Yet its interrogation of these politics is ultimately ingenuous and rudimentary, pushing the novel’s brief forays into the multiracial world outside the DeSilvas’ home more often into caricature than nuance.

Whereas ‘Ewa Which Way is merely set in Hawai‘i, Juniors falls too much into being a story about Hawai‘i. As a mode of literary tourism, the novel exists predominantly for Americans who wish to experience it through the eyes of an insider. Yet this “insider” is stuck in a vague quest for personal belonging which effaces the politics and history of Hawai‘i so much that its multiculturalism becomes a caricature devoid of any context. The novel’s image of a diverse Hawai‘i is merely an attractive pretense, and the novel’s troublesome (lack of) politics remains largely unquestioned and left without critical analysis. Yet both novels ultimately share the same problem: unless Hawai‘i’s multiculturalism can be included in a narrative as more than just backdrop – as something that invites critical thinking about the implications and aftereffects of this kind of rhetoric – it will continue to feel like tokenization rather than true inclusivity.
Afterword: Where Do We Go From Here?

In early January, I asked my oldest sibling what they thought of a particular Hawai‘i novel I had just finished reading. Neither of us were particularly enthused by it; we recognized the author’s place in the Local canon but ultimately saw the work as sensationalist and somewhat reductive. I called it a “literary hot take on Hawai‘i’s multiculturalism.” Then I was asked the question that has nagged at me for several months: can the canon of Hawai‘i writing expand beyond didactic explorations of Hawai‘i’s multiculturalism?

The short answer to this question, I believe, is yes. But this change will not be immediate, nor will it be easy. My research on this project has opened my eyes to the power of literature as a tool for cultural production and social awareness. Yet my focus on English-language literature has given me certain inherent limitations. Hawaiian forms of storytelling are overwhelmingly oral and poetic. Mele, mele hula, and oli are crucial to Hawaiian culture, but are not typically classified as “literature.” They are composed predominantly in the Hawaiian language, in which I have only an elementary foundation. There is likewise a growing genre of Hawaiian poetry, composed in both English and Hawaiian, that I have not included in this volume. It is important to recognize the formal and linguistic limitations that have made this thesis what it is.
The common literary framework exploring Hawai‘i’s multiculturalism must expand to include the political and economic critiques that are necessary to create a just and equitable mode of cultural production. This is precisely why critical literary studies is just as important as the production of literature itself. However, this analysis must come from within Hawai‘i. As local nonnative residents, we must fully reckon with colonial history and the ways in which English-language literature has written Native Hawaiians out of the story. Then we must make sure that our literature does not reinscribe this erasure without critique. We must reconstitute local culture and identity so that it does not maintain racial hierarchies and the refusal of Native Hawaiian sovereignty.

I feel as though much of what I am about to write has already been written by people far more learned than me. As Candace Fujikane wrote in 1997, “With the important gains made by the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, however, locals who claim Hawai‘i as home often do not understand Native Hawaiian nationalists who claim Hawai‘i as homeland, and as non-Hawaiian locals, we need to ask ourselves what our commitment to Hawai‘i and its peoples really means” (43). But in the 20 years since her essay was published, this reckoning does not yet seem to have taken place. Hawai‘i residents can no longer occupy a mental grey area that acknowledges that Hawai‘i “isn’t like the rest of America” but does not interrogate that statement any further. “Local” culture cannot simply be a refusal of Native Hawaiian sovereignty. A local’s connection to place cannot overrule a Hawaiian’s claim to ʻāina or lāhui. It cannot maintain racial hierarchies and continue to lock marginalized ethnic groups out of discussions of historical and cultural reparation.
There is not, nor should there be, any one story about Hawai‘i. The place and its people are far too multifaceted, and too often have Hawai‘i’s local Asian writers in particular favored their own personal sense of authenticity over justice. And too often have they sat comfortably between narrative ambiguity and political consciousness, forgoing radicalism for “art for art’s sake.” That time must pass, for now is a time for reparation. And literature’s role in enacting social and political change is immense— it has the power to change public opinion, raise awareness, and be radical in its construction.

It is perhaps incredibly idealistic of me to foster such hope. The cynic in me is yelling that it is ineffectual to focus on the promise of a literature that has shown time and time again its problems with caricature and stereotype. But hope can still include criticism, and without hope, we cannot see justice. Hawai‘i’s literature has far to go, primarily in recognizing Native Hawaiian artists and writers and letting them speak for themselves. A recognition of this art is simultaneously a recognition of a certain set of politics that many self-professed locals have been reluctant to acknowledge, and criticism, especially literary criticism, is necessary for the growth I hope to see.

Hawai‘i’s state motto is “Ua mau ke ea o ka ʻāina i ka pono,” which is most commonly translated as “The life of the land is perpetuated in righteousness.” These words were uttered by Kamehameha III in 1843 after the Kingdom of Hawai‘i regained its independence after five months of British occupation. The phrase’s definition depends greatly on how one defines pono—it can mean “righteousness” just as much as it can mean “harmony,” “universal balance,” or “justice.” The
political context of the phrase is also crucial to its meaning: this sense of pono is not simply moral, but it is political by nature. This applies to Hawai‘i’s literature as well. The Local canon must be perpetuated in righteousness. It must be equitable, and it must be just.

I have written this thesis at a time when so many things are changing—I have seen American awareness of Hawaiian sovereignty grow significantly within the past few years, and my own personal commitment to sovereignty has changed over the course of my short lifetime. I very much suspect that within the next five to ten years, configurations of Hawai‘i in the popular global imaginary will change, hopefully as a result of more responsible cultural production. I hope to see a sovereign Hawaiian nation in my lifetime, and I have immense hope that this will happen. But, as many sovereignty activists have already said, this will not come without unwavering support and active participation from Hawai‘i’s local nonnative residents.

So much work must still be done. My own research on this topic is far from finished, and my role in the broader study of Hawai‘i’s literature is remarkably small. This thesis will likely have a negligible impact in the grand scheme of things, but I will continue to strive for compassion and righteousness.

_He nui ka hana i koe_
Glossary: ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i

The following definitions of words from ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i which I have used throughout this thesis are compiled from the Pukui-Elderts Hawaiian dictionary, accessed online at wehewehe.org. My own notes on colloquialisms are in italics.

‘āina: n. Land, earth.

ali‘i: nvs. Chief, chiefess, officer, ruler, monarch, peer, headman, noble, aristocrat, king, queen, commander; royal, regal, aristocratic, kingly; to rule or act as chief, govern, reign; to become a chief.

ali‘i nui: high chief or great chief; typically the ruler of a single island.

aloha: nvt., nvs. Love, affection, compassion, marcy, sympathy, pity, kindness, sentiment, grace, charity; greeting, salutation, regards; sweetheart, lover, loved one; beloved, loving, kind, compassionate, charitable lovable; to love, to be fond of; to show kindness, mercy, pity, charity, affection; to venerate; to remember with affection; to greet, hail.

‘ehu: nvs. Reddish tinge of hair, of Polynesians and not Caucasians; one with ‘ehu hair; reddish-brown complexion said to be characteristic of some ‘ehu people; ruddy.

haole: nvs. White person, American, Englishman, Caucasian; American, English; formerly, any foreigner; foreign, introduced, of foreign origin, as plants, pigs, chickens; entirely white, of pigs (Malo 37; perhaps Malo actually means of foreign introduction).

hapa:
1. nvs. Portion, fragment, part, fraction, installment; to be partial, less. (Eng. half.)
2. nvs. Of mixed blood, person of mixed blood, as hapa Hawai‘i, part Hawaiian. See hapa haole.
**hapa haole:** nvs. Part-white person; of part-white blood; part white and part Hawaiian, as an individual or phenomenon. Hula hapa haole, a hula danced to a mele hapa haole (a Hawaiian type of song with English words and perhaps a few Hawaiian words).

**hula:** nvt. The hula, a hula dancer; to dance the hula. Song or chant used for the hula; to sing or chant for a hula.

**kamaʻāina:** nvi. Native-born, one born in a place, host; native plant, acquainted, familiar, Lit., land child. *Colloquially refers to people born and raised in Hawai‘i, regardless of race/ethnicity.* In the islands, the word can often be seen in terms of “kamaʻāina discounts” for local residents.

**kanaka (pl. kānaka):** nvs. Human being, man, person, individual, party, mankind, population; subject, as of a chief; laborer, servant, helper; attendant or retainer in a family (often a term of affection or pride); human sacrifice (FS 111); physique; human, manly, pregnant, inhabited; Hawaiian; private individual or party, as distinguished from the government. *Most commonly used to mean a person of Native Hawaiian descent by ancestry.*

**Kānaka Maoli (sing. Kanaka Maoli):** literally “real person,” but refers to people of Native Hawaiian ancestry.

**maoli:** vs. Native, indigenous, aborigine, genuine, true, real, actual; very, really, truly.

**kūʻē:** nvt. To oppose, resist, protest; opposite, versus, adverse, contrary, antagonistic, unwilling; objection. Lit., stand different. *Used as a call-to-action phrase in the Native Hawaiian sovereignty movement.*

**lāhui:** a political nation or people (i.e. the Native Hawaiian lāhui).

1. **nvs.** Nation, race, tribe, people, nationality; great company of people; species, as of animal or fish, breed; national, racial.
2. **vi.** To assemble, gather together.
3. **vt.** To prohibit, forbid, lay a taboo, proclaim a law.

**malihini:** nvs. Stranger, foreigner, newcomer, tourist, guest, company; one unfamiliar with a place or custom; new, unfamiliar, unusual, rare, introduced, of foreign origin; for the first time. Malihini mākaʻikaʻi, sight-seeing visitor, tourist.
mele: nvt. Song, anthem, or chant of any kind; poem, poetry; to sing, chant (preceded by both ke and ka).

ʻōlelo: nvt. Language, speech, word, quotation, statement, utterance, term, tidings; to speak, say, state, talk, mention, quote, converse, tell; oral, verbatim, verbal, motion (in early House of Nobles regulations).

ʻŌlelo Hawaiʻi: the Native Hawaiian language.

oli: nvt. Chant that was not danced to, especially with prolonged phrases chanted in one breath, often with a trill (ʻiʻi) at the end of each phrase; to chant thus.

pono:
1. nvs. Goodness, uprightness, morality, moral qualities, correct or proper procedure, excellence, well-being, prosperity, welfare, benefit, behalf, equity, sake, true condition or nature, duty; moral, fitting, proper, righteous, right, upright, just, virtuous, fair, beneficial, successful, in perfect order, accurate, correct, eased relieved; should, ought, must, necessary.
2. vs. Completely, properly, rightly, well, exactly, carefully, satisfactorily, much (an intensifier).
3. n. Property, resources, assets, fortune, belongings, equipment, household goods, furniture, gear of any kind, possessions, accessories, necessities.
4. n. Use, purpose, plan.
5. n. Hope.
6. vs. Careless, informal, improper, any kind of (preceding a step). Pono ‘ai, to eat in any way or anything, take potluck.

wahine (pl. wāhine): nvs. Woman, lady, wife; sister-in-law, female cousin-in-law of a man; queen in a deck of cards; womanliness, female, femininity; feminine; Mrs.; to have or obtain a wahine; to become a woman, as an adolescent.
Appendix: Historical Timeline

This timeline is not comprehensive, and it is intended to be brief. I have included the events that I find are the most relevant in order to make sense of the broader historical context of this thesis.

1778: the arrival of Captain James Cook and his crew in Hawai‘i.

1795: Aliʻi nui Kamehameha I unites the islands of Hawaiʻi, Oʻahu, Maui, Molokaʻi, and Lānaʻi after a series of battles, forming the unified Kingdom of Hawaiʻi.

1810: Niʻihau and Kauaʻi join the Kingdom of Hawaiʻi voluntarily, uniting the seven major populated islands under King Kamehameha I.

1820s: A large wave of missionaries came to Hawaiʻi from the American northeast. Their desire to “civilize” the Native Hawaiians, who they saw as immoral, feudal, and godless, contributed to the proliferation of Christianity in the islands.

1835: The first haole-owned sugar plantation opens in Hawaiʻi.

1840: A constitution transformed the government into a constitutional monarchy with a formal legislature and cabinet, replacing an informal council of aliʻi.

1845-1850: King Kamehameha III enacts the Māhele, a series of laws “that transformed the communal land system into private property” (Rohrer, 20) and were endorsed strongly by haole business owners.

1875: The Reciprocity Treaty of 1875, negotiated by King Kalākaua, allowed for exclusive free trade between the United States and Hawaiʻi. The treaty made
exports from Hawai‘i to the U.S. duty-free, and was a boon to Hawai‘i’s sugar industry, already predominantly run by haoles.

1890: Tariff Act of 1890 (McKinley Tariff) raised tariffs on imported goods by almost fifty percent, dealing a blow to Hawai‘i sugar companies.

January 17, 1893: Sovereign Hawaiian Queen Lili‘uokalani overthrown in a coup d‘état led by prominent white business owners and backed by the U.S. military.

1893 – July 7, 1898: The provisional democratic “Republic of Hawai‘i,” with plantation owner Sanford Dole as President, holds governmental power in the islands. They also banned the Hawaiian language in schools and in the government in 1896.

July 7, 1898: Hawai‘i annexed by the United States.

1890s-1920s: Hawai‘i sees massive waves of immigration from parts of Asia and Europe as migrants come to work on sugar and pineapple plantations.

1920s: Ocean liner travel industry grows dramatically, allowing for more Americans to visit and move to the Hawaiian Islands.

1931-1932: These years mark the proceedings of the infamous Massie Case, in which Thalia Massie (wife of an American naval officer stationed in Hawai‘i and relative of former president Theodore Roosevelt) accuses a group of local men of color of kidnapping and raping her. The men were innocent and falsely accused, and on being tried on these charges, they were not convicted. Thalia’s mother, husband, and other close associates then kidnapped Joseph Kahahawai, one of the accused men, on the steps of the Honolulu courthouse and took him to a rental house in Kahala (a suburb of Honolulu) where they interrogated, tortured, and later shot and killed him. The group was found guilty of manslaughter but served a sentence of one hour in the governor’s office, after Governor Sanford Dole succumbed to pressure from the military and federal government. They soon left the islands.

December 7, 1941: Japanese fighter pilots bomb the U.S. military base at Pearl Harbor on the island of O‘ahu. The event kickstarts U.S. involvement in World War II and leads the U.S. to instate martial law, bringing Hawai‘i more widely into public American consciousness.
**October 24, 1944:** Martial law lifted in Hawai‘i.

**June 27, 1952:** Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 (McCarran-Walter Act) enacted in the United States and all U.S. territories, ending the exclusion of Asian immigrants and allowing those already in the U.S. to become naturalized citizens. In effect since December 24, 1952.

**August 21, 1959:** Hawai‘i inducted as the 50th state of the United States.

**November 1959:** Michener’s *Hawaii* published in the United States, kicking off an age of postwar tourist media and tourist travel to the Hawaiian Islands.

**June 30, 1968:** Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Hart-Celler Act) put into effect. The act removed the national quota-based immigration system that had been in place since the 1920s. New visa categories with preference for workers’ skills and familial relationships with U.S. citizens and residents were put in place, and immediate relatives of citizens could immigrate with no restrictions.

**1970s:** The Hawaiian Renaissance kicks off the start of the modern Hawaiian sovereignty movement.

**1976:** Native Hawaiian activist Walter Ritte and the group Protect Kaho‘olawe ʻOhana (PKO) protest and resist the U.S. Navy’s use of the island of Kaho‘olawe for military bombardement training. Activism around Kaho‘olawe inspired and heightened the mid-1970s Native Hawaiian renaissance, an age of renewed political awareness and activism in the Native Hawaiian people.

**1978:** The Hawai‘i state government lifts the nineteenth-century ban on the use of the Hawaiian language in schools and government, making it an official language along with English.

**June 1978:** The Hawai‘i Literary Arts Council sponsors the Talk Story Conference.

**1987:** Sovereignty organization Ka Lāhui Hawai‘i founded by Mililani Trask.

**November 23, 1993:** Signed by President Bill Clinton, the 1993 Apology Resolution (U.S. Public Law 103-150) is a joint resolution of the U.S. Congress which formally apologizes on behalf of the United States government for its participation in the illegal overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i in 1893. It
“further acknowledges that the Native Hawaiian people never directly relinquished to the United States their claims to their inherent sovereignty as a people over their national lands, either through the Kingdom of Hawaii or through a plebiscite or referendum”.

**January 17, 1993:** The centennial anniversary of the illegal overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i. Hundreds gathered outside the state capitol in Honolulu to protest and renew calls for the return of a sovereign Hawaiian nation.

**2009:** Hawai‘i Senator Daniel Akaka proposes the controversial Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act of 2009, also known as the Akaka Bill, to the U.S. Congress.

**2014:** The U.S. Department of the Interior debates the future of a federally recognized Hawaiian government. This debate still persists today.
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