

# **Racism Against Native Hawaiians at the University of Hawai'i**

## **A Personal and Political View**

HAUNANI-KAY TRASK

### **I. The Colonial Context**

Since the eighteenth century arrival of Westerners in Hawai'i, my ancestral home has been vaunted as a "paradise" of sunny beaches, lush, unspoiled valleys, erupting volcanoes, and happy Natives. To the West, and increasingly to Japan, Hawai'i represents a Pacific playground for escape, romance, or recreation. It is a fantasy, a state of mind.

To our Native people, however, Hawai'i has been an American colony since U.S. marines, in support of an all-white oligarchy, overthrew our legally-constituted Native government in 1893. Forcible annexation to the United States followed in 1898. None of our people wanted, voted, or were represented in this American-backed government.<sup>1</sup>

During the territorial years (1900-1959), *haole* (white) hegemony was consolidated on all fronts. Economically, the missionary-descended businessmen's oligarchy had most of the arable land in sugar while imposing a repressive plantation society on Hawaiians and Asian immigrants. Politically, the ruling Republican Party handpicked a favorite son as governor who was then dutifully appointed by the American president. Militarily, American forces expanded their landholdings (bases, weapons storage areas, housing settlements) during World War II when Hawai'i was under martial law.<sup>2</sup>

As a direct result of this military-business condominium, our culture and people continued to decline. Powers of empire swept like a firestorm over things Hawaiian. The earliest stages of Euro-American contact had

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brought death by disease. By 1900, our full-blood Native population had dwindled to less than 4 percent of its original strength at contact 120 years before. After forcible annexation, the cultural assault on Hawaiian dance, social values, even habits of mating and affection begun by the missionaries in 1820 continued with the closure of all Hawaiian language schools. Children caught speaking Hawaiian were beaten and sent home. By contrast, the English language received official sanction along with western music, dress and social manners.<sup>3</sup>

At statehood in 1959, Hawai'i entered a tourist boom period. Sugar plantations were slowly transformed into resort complexes. Urban slums appeared as more immigrants from Asia searched for work in the hotels. Beach villages sprang up in response to the evictions of Native people in the path of development.<sup>4</sup>

In 1992, nearly a hundred years since the overthrow, Hawai'i seems a tinsel paradise. An intensely commercialized and militarized American outpost, our islands are more than ever a "colony." Native Hawaiians, like American Indians, have become a dispossessed, angry minority in their own land. Our culture has been preyed upon and cruelly cheapened by mass tourism. American cultural hegemony, meanwhile, is increasingly dominant through popular culture and the presence of six-and-a-half-million tourists a year.<sup>5</sup>

Resistance to this onslaught has not been entirely crushed. While Hawai'i's economy shifted its base from sugar to tourism, a political and cultural movement among our people began in the seventies. We focused on Native rights to a separate land base, restitution from the American government for the overthrow and annexation, and a ban on hotels and other developments destructive of a way of living based on fishing and farming. The movement started with defensive eviction struggles in 1970, expanded into offensive occupations of military lands by 1976, and had evolved into a nationalist front by 1980.<sup>6</sup>

Like other indigenous people throughout the Pacific, we began to demand sovereignty. International links were forged between our people and other indigenous nationalists, including Tahitians, Maori, Kanaks, and American Indians. The United Nations, the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific Movement, and the South Pacific Forum all witnessed sovereignty assertions by indigenous Pacific Islanders. Finally, by the early eighties, Hawaiian nationalism was perceived by business and land interests in Hawai'i as a growing threat.<sup>7</sup>

Only in this context of colonization and decolonization can formal education in Hawai'i be understood. Indeed, public education in Hawai'i is similar in purpose to Francophone education in French-controlled Tahiti, and English education in commonwealth New Zealand.<sup>8</sup>

The University of Hawai'i stands atop the educational pyramid of public schools as the flagship campus for the state. With over twenty thousand students, it is a living symbol of colonization. In many ways the university is an educational equivalent to the American military command center in Hawai'i. Both serve as guardians of white dominance, both support the State economy, and both provide a training ground for future technocrats.

Just as universities in other colonies function to legitimate and entrench the power of the colonizing culture, so the University of Hawai'i functions to maintain *haole* American control.<sup>9</sup> The standard American university curriculum, bureaucratic structure, and white male faculty characterize the institution. In addition there is a School of Travel Industry Management, a Chair of Business Enterprise, and a Hawai'i Real Estate Center which support the local tourist industry. An affiliated East-West Center, a creature of the Federal government, was established as a counterinsurgency think tank during the Vietnam War and continues as a gathering place for military, government, and corporate interests focused on Asia and the Pacific Basin. All this exists on a tiny Polynesian island that is part of the most isolated archipelago in the world.

It also exists on the ancestral land base of the Hawaiian people. As a *haole* enclave in a local society where Asians are the largest numerical group and whites and Hawaiians are each about a fifth of the one million residents in Hawai'i, the university is a nineteenth century throwback to the first stages of white colonialism. People of color comprise more than 75 percent of the student body while the faculty is nearly 75 percent white. Along with the sugar companies and the banks, the university is one of the few remaining institutions where no attempts have been made to add a little Native color to the visible white reality.

In 1981 I entered this bastion of white power as an assistant professor of American Studies. I was an active member and occasional spokesperson for various struggles in the Hawaiian Movement. And I had recently completed a dissertation on feminist theory at the University of Wisconsin. Like dozens of other Hawaiians who had been sent to the metropole to become assimilated professionals, I had returned to colony Hawai'i as a Native nationalist. My growing public persona was that of an indigenous critic of American imperialism in Hawai'i. And although I was identified by the *haole* press as one of the more militant activists in the movement, nothing I did or said was beyond the bounds of critical public dissent.

But in a colony, any dissent is threatening, especially by Natives. My application and hiring unleashed forces of racism and political suppression in the department that lasted until I was transferred to another academic unit (as part of a settlement of a racism/sexism grievance) in the fall of 1986. Between my hire and my transfer, I lived through a five-year battle (with

student-community support) against all manner of oppressive and exploitative conditions: racism by individual faculty and by the institution as a whole; attempts to prevent my written and verbal expressions of critical political views; violation of the academic freedom to teach certain subjects and ideas, and petty daily harassment on the job. At times, even the recognition of my humanity as a Hawaiian was at issue.

But, with the help of supporters, including my faculty union, I prevailed. And for my own people, the victory of one Hawaiian woman who fought the *haole* world and won is a victory worth recounting.

## II. Racism and Suppression of Political Views

The strange origins of an American Studies Department in colony Hawai'i deserve some background. Evolving out of the federal government's East-West Center in the early sixties, the department had been chaired by the same man for nearly twenty years when I applied for my job. By his own proud admission, he had worked for the Central Intelligence Agency prior to his appointment at the East-West Center and the university. As chair, he had hired the early members of the department, including two of his former students. Structurally, he had enormous power, with only weak advisory committees beneath him. As a result, his long tenure as chair had created a docile faculty too willing to be governed and too meek to demand a change in leadership.

By 1981 the department had nine full-time, male faculty, one half-time, female faculty, and two emeritus male faculty. Two of their number were Asian, the rest were white. None was Hawaiian.

Academically, only a third of the faculty had acceptable publishing records, including books. The remainder had published with vanity presses or, like the chair, had published only a few articles or nothing at all.

In ideological terms, the department represented a very "celebrate America," pro-capitalist, pro-empire perspective. The Black Civil Rights Movement, the Anti-War movement, and the Women's Movement did not appear in the teaching of most faculty. Intellectually, the faculty were (and still are) in a pre-sixties mode. Indeed, there was no Third World or Marxist analyses of America at all. And there was surely no attention paid to the Hawaiian Movement, or to the military/tourist exploitation of Hawai'i because of its colonial status. The Hawaiian people, beyond our tourist manifestations, were completely unknown to the faculty, just as Maori communities in New Zealand would be unknown to English professors at the University of Auckland. Finally, the characteristic isolation of academics from the surrounding community was compounded by the racism of a faculty who felt superior to the general public, including students, because they were overwhelmingly Asians and Hawaiians or, as Americans are fond

of repeating, "non-white."

Culturally, this superiority showed its hand in a number of ways. Disparaging remarks were often made by faculty about pidgin-speaking local students who could not (rather than would not) speak what the faculty called "standard English." The lack of knowledge about American cultural institutions—like the *New York Times* or championship baseball teams—on the part of students irritated faculty who bemoaned the "provincialism" of life in Hawai'i (indeed, one adjunct faculty wrote an entire book about this "provincialism" which, predictably, was published by a vanity press and wound up as required reading in his courses). Local cultural traits—for example, ethnic humor or habits of local dress—were ridiculed by many faculty as backcountry buffoonery. And Hawaiian culture, when noticed at all, was relegated to the entertainment/recreational category of an occasional *hula* (dance) festival or commercial *lū'au* (feast).

In reality, most of the American Studies faculty behaved like colonial settlers on the outskirts of empire enduring their postings until a better opportunity came along.

### **Act One: In the Land of the White Man**

By February of 1981, I had applied for a position in American Studies that called for expertise in Women's Studies and in a cross-cultural field (in my case, Hawai'i and the Pacific). Some fifty-one other candidates had applied, and the department personnel committee had chosen six semi-finalists, including myself.

On February 23, the Department selected their top two choices: One female candidate about to complete a Ph.D. in American Studies at an Ivy League university, and myself, about to complete a Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Wisconsin. The meeting was very long (a total of six hours divided into afternoon and evening sessions), and contentious. My politics were openly discussed and one faculty member (who was Asian) asserted that my hire would be inappropriate because I was "radical." This was only the first salvo.

The field had been narrowed but my hire was yet to come. Sometime in late February, the chair removed several pages listing community service from my vita, which had been placed on file for departmental perusal. When discovered by one of my faculty supporters, the chair said he meant only to "balance" the vitae, since the other candidate did not have a list of community activities. The other finalist, meanwhile, was flown in from the American continent for an interview and public lecture. She stayed at the chair's house where he also arranged for a reception in her honor. As a Hawaiian candidate, and an activist one at that, no such amenities were extended to me.

By the middle of March, when both candidates were being interviewed, relations between some of my faculty supporters and the chair had deteriorated. To fulfill the requirements of due process (and steer clear of administrative oversight), some faculty insisted that I should also be hosted at a reception. A hastily-arranged one was held at a faculty member's house, but by this time any "routine" interview process was beyond salvage. It was clear that I was treading on Whites-only territory. Despite the presence of two Asians in the department (both of whom self-identified as assimilationist and spoke openly against my hire because I was an activist), my presence was perceived, at least by the chair, as a Hawaiian encroachment.

On March 20, the faculty voted. According to my supporters, the meeting was filled with such argument and accusation regarding my "radicalism" on behalf of Hawaiians, that everyone felt exhausted in the end. After an initial tie, I was selected on the second vote which visibly upset the chair. Later, he would tell other faculty they betrayed him by voting for a "troublemaker." As in the past, the faculty assumed he would follow established procedures and offer the job to the chosen candidate, that is, to me. Instead, he called the other finalist, said the faculty was hopelessly "split" and the position, "frozen." I, of course, never heard from him.

Two silent weeks elapsed before I called the personnel committee chair to tell him I had heard nothing. He was flabbergasted. As a white, Yale-educated male faculty member, he had nothing in his personal experience to prepare him for the chair's racism. While we spoke, I suggested the department chair might withdraw the position, which elicited laughter and a reply that I was "paranoid."

On the tenth of April, at a faculty meeting called by the chair, he read a prepared statement. The following is a direct quote from the chronology of events kept by the personnel committee.

(The chair said) "he believed the university and the department were not democracies, that they were rather 'authoritarian and paternalistic' in fact. He went on to state that the provost, the chancellor, and the president of the university had all been approached by him and they had agreed to block Trask's appointment. Consequently, no one was to be hired for the slot which had been empty for several years."

"Not a single faculty member spoke in support of the chair's actions. The response, on the contrary, was at first shock over the violating of department collegiality, openness, and agreed-upon procedures, and then a unanimous request that the chair reconsider his stand."

Faculty supporters later told me the chair said I was "unqualified" for the job but gave no reasons.

The day after this debacle, I gathered together a group of student and

community supporters, and resource people (attorneys, researchers, photographers) to strategize our position. Given the faculty's vote and thus their confidence in my credentials, and given the historic antagonism between Whites and Hawaiians, it was clear to us the chair's actions were racist. The American Studies faculty would continue to deny that racism was involved at all, choosing instead to dig up the familiar academic smokescreen of lack of "collegiality" by the chair. As Hawaiians, however, our experience told another story. All the obvious signs of racism were present in the chair's behavior: fear at my application; nervousness in my presence; procedural "irregularities" during the interview process; vociferous denial of racist behavior; and finally, outright rejection of my hire.

But the worst was yet to come. On April 16, the chair called another meeting with four faculty who supported me, and myself.

When the meeting began, there was a menacing strangeness in the air. As we took our seats, the chair turned off all lights and in the unannounced and eerily threatening dark, began a slide-show. His narrating voice, tight with anger, seeped out of the projection booth. One by one, horrifying slides of Nazi victims at Buchenwald hit the screen. After a few minutes, the chair began making references to his heritage as a Jew which, he heatedly insisted, made it impossible for him to be a racist. No one, to my knowledge, had accused him of racism, nor did he say anyone had. I felt him to be on the jagged edge of insanity.

When the slides were finished, none of the faculty spoke. I began to wonder why I had ever wanted a job in such a crazy department. The chair came to the table in a trembling fury, saying, to our complete surprise, he would hire me. He had failed, he went on, to secure a part-time, non-tenure track position he called a "compromise." Thus, he was forced to offer the original position for which I had interviewed.

Various faculty tried, in a timid and roundabout way, to tell him that his behavior was "inappropriate" and that I was being unjustly treated. One professor, who was also Jewish, pleaded with him about his attitudes regarding Hawaiians, intimating that his reference to the Jewish holocaust was both strange and irrelevant. None of the faculty mentioned the slide-show directly, pretending they had not seen it. Neither did anyone express anger at the chair's intimidation in the meeting. The sense of the faculty seemed to be that he was still the chair, no matter how obscenely he behaved.

I had been spoken about in the third person for twenty minutes with not a single verbal acknowledgement of my presence in the room. Although all faculty invited by the chair had voted for me, none felt any obligation to speak to me directly. The scene moved toward the bizarre.

Not knowing what else to do or say, and feeling both humiliated and

very angry, I asked for an opportunity to speak, which was granted by the faculty. The chair still refused to recognize me. I recited the recent events which brought us to the present reminding everyone, especially the chair, that I had survived a national search. I noted that the other finalist (who was *haole*) would never have been mistreated if she had been selected. To me, this was evidence enough that I was suffering discrimination because of my race and my politics. The chair's earlier comment that I was "unqualified" only underscored my point. I concluded by saying a letter of intent to hire should be drawn up immediately.

The faculty eagerly agreed. They understood events were out of control but were reluctant to move ahead.

Naturally, the chair refused to give me a letter. A few days later, the personnel committee met with him, said they would not support his refusal, and communicated as much to the chancellor. Several meetings ensued between the faculty and the administration where the faculty continued to argue violations of procedures and of "collegiality" by the chair. Eventually, the chancellor was asked for a change in chairmanship and for permission to hire me.

Nothing happened.

"Racism" was never uttered by any of the faculty. Privately, some faculty told me they found events inexplicable, and when I proffered racism as an explanation, they became silent. I felt their world locked in everlasting refusal.

Our committee proceeded to assemble representatives from a half-dozen Hawaiian communities, from departments across the campus, and from student organization. A meeting was planned between department representatives and our group.

In many ways, the encounter was a good illustration of the tensions between Whites and Hawaiians in the colony. Although the behavior of our committee members was respectful, the department's two representatives, both white men, were visibly frightened by the physical presence of so many Hawaiians. The chair of my support group (also a white man) presented our demand that I be hired as soon as possible. The rest of the committee expressed the general concern that I was being treated badly because I was Hawaiian and that various Hawaiian communities, once the word was out, would look very unfavorably on the situation.

Our support committee had decided it was absolutely crucial for the department to understand their situation. Accustomed to secrecy, they were being told that public exposure was imminent if I was not hired. In the long run, this constant threat of exposure kept the faculty moving toward a resolution.

By the end of April, there was a new acting chair. (The previous one



had finally been forced to resign.) I was in the last stages of completing the dissertation, and my support committee was still planning strategy in the event that a letter of hire was not tendered to me.

May and June were hectic. Department instability continued because the acting chair was to leave for a foreign country and another chair would need to be appointed. I was offered the job and, of course, accepted. But I began to be seen, in the subtlest of ways, as the source of embarrassment, much in the way rape victims are seen because they have brought shame to families or communities.

In addition, my high visibility as a spokesperson for Hawaiian rights continued to be discussed in various faculty meetings as already disruptive to the department given my problematic hire. My critical stance on the U.S. as an imperialist power in Hawai'i and around the world was seen as potentially dangerous if students were affected by my ideas. My faculty supporters began to feel uncomfortably in the minority.

In July, four months after the faculty had voted for me, I defended my dissertation at Wisconsin, and became an assistant professor of American Studies at the University of Hawai'i. The struggle to get me hired was over, but undercurrents of bitterness remained only to resurface later.

## **Act Two: In the Land of the White Woman**

Between the fall of 1981 and the fall of 1984, the chair was a white woman. At first, I felt relief at having a new chair, especially one who had voted for me. A month into her appointment, however, I began to sense that nothing had changed. Intellectual, political, even stylistic differences became the source of heated conflict between us. Her belief that there existed a culturally correct way of speaking and behaving made it clear to me how white hegemony in Hawai'i and on the campus would mean a tight constraint on *my* cultural behaviors. I was to start acting, as we say in Hawaiian, as a *ho'ohaole*, someone who behaves like a white person. I was shocked, bemused, furious, and depressed.

I was told what to teach and what not to teach. In my required reading of an introductory course on American society, I had included sections on racism and capitalism as basic American institutions and ideologies. The chair pressured me to remove those sections and supplant them with units on the family and Christianity. I refused, but the disagreement left a bitter feeling between us.

Regarding faculty meetings, the chair tried to tell me what to say and what not to say, even how I should speak. After one faculty meeting, she took me aside to say I should "treat the faculty appropriately." Given that I had disagreed with several senior faculty about their treatment of Asian foreign students which I considered discriminatory, it was clear that she

meant I was not to argue or challenge other faculty, especially as I was a junior member of the department. Such constant directions to me resulted in constant fighting as I very much resented being patronized.

During one of these arguments, the chair suggested I ought to be "grateful" to the faculty for hiring me. This kind of liberal paternalism infuriated me. It implied that I was not the most qualified person for the job despite my surviving a national search. It also meant that I was somehow to be her apprentice, that is, to occupy the inferior place white racists habitually reserve for their dark friends. Part of this status was evident on one occasion when I was introduced to some visiting faculty as "our little Hawaiian." It had never entered my mind to introduce the chair to visiting Hawaiians as "our little *haole*."

Beyond these very telling incidents were larger controversies about my political analysis of historical events. The best case involved student complaints (all by *haole* students) about statements I made regarding genocide against American Indians as comparable to Nazi genocide against Jews. Using the complaints as an excuse, the chair tried to have me formally censured by the department. Despite support from my students disputing what the first set of students, who were not registered in my class, had alleged, the chair asked the personnel committee to censure me. I was not asked for my version of what had taken place. Moreover, the chair argued that by entering a formal complaint in my personnel file, evidence would be available later when I came up for tenure consideration. Finally, our faculty union was consulted, at my insistence. They told the committee, in writing, that neither the chair nor the committee had the power of censure, which was held by the administration. They also urged that a more informal settling of disagreements be attempted.

All except one member of the personnel committee supported the chair in her censoring effort. When they finally agreed to meet with me, the assumption was that I was guilty of unprofessional conduct and deserved a reprimand. Neither the supporting evidence of my students nor my own explanations was allowed into the discussion. Predictably, we never broached the subject of whether Americans *had* committed genocide against Indians, nor whether Hitler *had* used the example of U.S. treatment of Indians in his planning of the extermination of the Jews (which I had said, and which the students had complained about).<sup>10</sup>

This case in particular seems so egregiously a violation of every tenet of university life: the right to teach certain analyses, the right to defend what is taught, the right to confront and wrangle over disagreement, the right to be free of harassment because of what is taught. And yet, such are the contours of racism, of the disgusting detail upon which the small freedom to teach a critical perspective is made to depend.

Finally, the chair had said I could not teach graduate courses (a requirement for tenure) until I was a member of the graduate faculty. At the time, I accepted the statement as fact, but later it would prove to be false, and thus part of my grievance argument that I had suffered discrimination.

By 1984 and the change in chairs, my relationship with the department was strained almost beyond repair. I had increased my public criticism of the treatment of Hawaiians, of the failure of the state of Hawai'i to enforce our Native trusts and place Hawaiians on the land, of the historic and contemporary power of white people in Hawai'i, of the exploitative, prostituting effects of mass-based corporate tourism. I had criticized America and the state of Hawai'i in two national magazines, one national radio show, and in a BBC film about the Pacific. I had also travelled to the United Nations in Geneva to testify about America's overthrow of our government, illegal annexation of our islands, and continued abuse of our trust lands. This testimony was subsequently published in one of our local dailies.

Every occasion on which I made a public lecture or speech covered in the local press or, worse, in the national or international press, created a flurry of discussion about the damaging reputation—that is, the reputation of a critical voice in a status profession—I was giving the department. As one letter-writer to the local newspaper put it, there seemed to be a “department of un-American Studies at the University.”

None of this is meant to convey some extraordinary level of activism on my part. In fact, there were other Hawaiians more publicly active but they were not on the faculty. And that, more than anything, was the crucial line I had crossed. I was a public person in a little colonial university where public dissent, especially on the side of Natives, is perceived as outrageous and threatening. Hawai'i is not California, nor even Wisconsin. We have no “liberal” wing in our state government, and certainly not in the university. There are no critical news stations or radical magazines in Hawai'i, and there is definitely no unified opposition. In short, there is widespread censorship, some of it self-induced, most of it institutionally enforced. Thus my kind of public criticism habitually results in extreme over-reactions on the part of the state government, the tourist industry, and American patriots (like American Studies faculty) in the islands. Because there is so little dissent, there is no tolerance of what little exists.

### **Act Three: The Pitched Battle**

The next chair had been a member of the personnel committee that had tried to censure me. I had no doubts about the nature of his feelings or the style of his chairmanship. Like his predecessors, he was authoritarian, elitist, occasionally racist, and always hostile to any changes I suggested or privileges I desired.

The deterioration of working conditions made me rethink my whole strategy. Up until 1985, I had been operating defensively. Every struggle began with my reaction to some policy on the part of the chairs. Despite worsening relationships and increasingly damaging yearly evaluations, I kept performing in the hope that my record, if excellent, would force the faculty to vote for tenure.

But a combination of factors shifted me into an offensive strategy. The first was the constant reference in discussions with the chairs and in my yearly evaluations to my "straining collegiality" in the department. Since "collegiality" was a requirement for tenure (a requirement, by the way, that had been added to departmental criteria only *after* I was hired), I sensed that "collegiality" would be the reason given for my eventual firing. The second factor was the impossible trap of being required to teach a graduate course for tenure consideration at the same time the chairs denied me an opportunity to do so.

Finally, when the department hired a white male assistant professor and gave him a graduate course in his first year, I filed a sex and race discrimination grievance with our union. Before the filing, I tried one last time to talk the chair into allowing me a required graduate course in my field. His answer, without explanation, was no.

The grievance forced the battle into the jarring light of public scrutiny. It took over a year and a half to come to completion during which time my relations with the past two chairs collapsed into near war. Since they were both named in the grievance, they both felt under attack. I alleged that I had been deceived, discriminated against, and obstructed in my professional duties—e.g. teaching a graduate course—because of my race, my politics, and my gender. Because I was critical of the United States, and because I was Hawaiian, I was being denied what non-critical white men, some of whom were less published than I, were being allowed as a matter of course. The whole episode smelled of white male privilege.

Our faculty union supported my efforts and greatly strengthened my arguments. Their presence forced the conflict out of an individual arena into an institutional one. The chairs now had to respond, even if perfunctorily, to an interested party outside the department.

As the grievance made its way through layers of administrative bureaucracy, it was interesting to analyze the responses. At the first two stages, the administration (in the person of a hearing officer) found rationales to support the department. This was not surprising, given that chairs are considered to be representatives of the administration in the departments. The basic finding had been that denying me a graduate course was a chair's "managerial prerogative." On this reasoning, anyone could be denied all sorts of rights of employment. The principle of "fair rules fairly applied"

would never make headway when chairs had such power.

At the third stage of the grievance, however, things began to change. The issue went to the union grievance committee and then to the full union board for a vote. This stage was crucial because my perceptions and arguments would be examined by other, non-involved faculty. If the grievance committee recommended to the board which subsequently voted to seek arbitration, then my peers saw merit in my case. Although this was not a judgment of the issue, it did give me an enormous boost of confidence when the union moved quickly to the arbitration stage.

While both chairs had an opportunity to respond to my charges of sex and race discrimination at the first two stages of the grievance, they took a nonchalant attitude to the entire process. But when the union voted favorably, they began to harass board members, badgering them by phone about the alleged unfairness of the grievance committee procedures. Although the female chair had never complained about the procedures when she was on the union board, she found them suddenly biased. Finally, a long letter from both chairs to the union president emphasized that if my allegations were found to have merit by an outside arbitrator, the university could be in violation of federal civil rights laws.

The chairs' letter was intended to frighten the board, possibly even to force them to retract their support of my grievance. But it had the opposite effect. Board members were shocked at the crude efforts to influence them; eventually, the union president directed them to maintain confidentiality.

The chairs' letter gave proof to my argument that every attempt I had made to discuss my situation resulted in being treated ever more like a pariah. The union board was now being harassed as I had been, and they did not like it. Unwittingly, the chairs illustrated the very conduct I had deplored.

By the time the university, the union, and I had agreed to an arbitrator, a change in personnel in the upper reaches of the administration had occurred. Drawn from the faculty, these new people dealt with grievances in a less adversarial manner, seeking negotiation rather than arbitration. Again, the public nature of arbitration gave the university pause. For the sake of image and for the well-being of faculty-administration relationships, in-house resolutions of conflict were preferred.

After three months of serious discussion, a satisfactory agreement was achieved. I was transferred to the Hawaiian Studies program and became the first full-time faculty there. Given that I had been working with faculty across the campus on a Hawaiian Studies Task Force and had published in that area as well, it was a near perfect choice. For me, no other move could have been better.

My position was also transferred, which infuriated the powers at

American Studies. Since they were scheduled for a gradual loss of four positions through retirement, however, my unexpected departure actually helped them. They also did not have to worry about losing a grievance on sex and race discrimination. I had won, but I had also spent nearly five years under terrible employment conditions because I was both a Hawaiian activist and a critic of the United States. No victory, no matter how sweet, could repay those lost five years.

### III. Conclusions: Simple Truths and Strategies

I applied for tenure in Hawaiian Studies in the fall of 1986. With a book, seven articles, and a good teaching record, I felt able to withstand scrutiny from anyone. An ad hoc committee unanimously recommended for tenure and promotion which was granted by the board of regents in July of 1987.

As I look back at my long struggle, some basic truths emerge. The most important, I think, is that institutional racism and sexism cannot be fought alone. In my case, lack of tenure, indigenous status, and female gender placed me in a profoundly powerless situation. My politics exacerbated what would have, in any white department, been a disadvantaged position at the start. But a determined public posture as a Native nationalist in a colony guarantees repression. In this situation, it is a truism that the more besieged the activist, the greater the need for support.

A coalition of supporters must be formed for daily strategizing and as a core to organize a larger community group. For faculty who have attentive publics, like feminists, environmentalists, African American, Asian, Chicano, and Native activists, this organizing effort will prove crucial when negotiations finally occur. And the group will remind both victim *and* institution that the politics of the issue encompasses more than just the person involved.

In terms of strategy, the struggle must not bog down on individual players. For example, all three chairs in American Studies were discriminatory, but the first chair acted in such a freakish manner, it seemed for a while the problem was his alone. The behavior of the chairs over the next four and half years proved this wrong. But even if it were otherwise, the tendency to see events as individual acts must be countered by a smart political sense that tells us as people of color when institutional racism is operating. Political analysis must always be primary when formulating strategy.

Tactically, public exposure is the best weapon in fighting an institution whose actions depend upon secrecy. In Hawai'i, the myth of racial harmony, indeed, of a veritable racial paradise has so thoroughly obscured the existence of racism against Native Hawaiians that any charge of such is considered false on its face. Beyond our specific problems, universities in general are nervous about racism because they purport to uphold principles

long since negated by the rest of the business world. It is always wise to hold the university to its professed ideals because the potential for embarrassment is large.

Other tactical lessons are less central but good to know: the fact that liberal supporters who have no ideology or analysis and are just "nice people" will be duly shocked by racism, offer private expressions of sympathy, but refuse to join a support committee. They suffer from the fear of public activity that afflicts so many academics. Of course, in my case, such people had nothing to lose while most of the Hawaiians who supported me had much to lose—a day's pay or other difficulties with work, or even families—but felt the injustice so keenly they were willing to take some risks. Professors, especially white men, were generally unwilling.

In addition, a few supporters were able to go part of the way but gave up at some point because the struggle dragged on and on. This kind of attrition is predictable but must not be allowed to affect the issues or the strategies. Still, more than any other obstacle, this depletion of forces depresses the group. In my case, the union filled a big gap here because their staff were both paid and emotionally distant.

And as far as unions go, it is my absolute belief that people of color need unions (even mediocre ones) because having *some* institutional voice is better than having *no* institutional voice. The white male boy's club is for white males, and on occasion, for compliant white females. But it is no protection for activist faculty of color.

The most obvious conclusion is that racism and sexism are the evil within. Nothing—not the sixties, not Third World wars of liberation, not a minuscule middle class of people of color—has changed any of that. Everywhere in the academy racism and sexism and a host of other oppressive creatures are festering and growing.

While speaking out on controversial issues is apparently protected at universities, there are countless stories of denied tenure that tell a different truth. Thus the struggle for faculty of color who are also activists includes free speech, not only academic freedom. In my case, references to the confusion between my roles as "citizen" and "professor" appeared in my yearly job renewals as causes of collegial "strain." I had replied that no distinction exists between the categories. The chair, however, argued that political speech *by a professor* is inappropriate *in the public realm*. Of course, he meant *critical* political speech. Professors who supported the status quo never had the problems I did. Given that political speech is absolutely protected speech, it is not difficult to see why the chairs attempted such stupid distinctions.

This denial to faculty of the role of "public intellectuals" is one of the most serious abridgements now taking place in universities. Of all the

institutions in society, the university is the one which has an obligation to analyze, criticize, and provoke in the public realm. Without this, the role of “public intellectual” will be filled by gadflies, entrepreneurs, or publicity hounds. And the function of public criticism will pass from the university altogether.

This brings me to a last point which is, as well, a beginning: resistance. More than verbal disagreement, resistance takes organization, planning, and a tenacity that is its own reward. For women of color, especially those who are very public in their positions as intellectuals and as activists, there is no other alternative but struggle. Without it, institutions wear us down by petty bureaucratic procedures and the force of inertia.

### Postscript

Today, from my position as director of the Center for Hawaiian Studies, I look back at those five years as a crucial testing ground. Racism doesn't go away; struggles just reappear at different power levels, on more dangerous fronts. Resistance at the beginning of my academic career prepared me for a more serious struggle that I have just won.

From October 1990 through May 1991, I was at the center of an intense free-speech controversy involving a public statement I wrote for our campus paper. The *haole* power structure at the university, including the administration, conducted three public investigations of me because I replied to a white student's complaint about being *haole* in Hawai'i by educating that student about his white history and his obligation to the Native people of Hawai'i. As a result, I was threatened with removal from my position as director, because of my unsettling speech. Although all three investigations came to naught, and I remain Director of the Center for Hawaiian Studies, the controversy brought out the vicious racism against Hawaiians, especially those of us who publicly resist attacks on our language, culture, and Native status.

The underlying issue is not free-speech, however, but racism, the racism of white men over Native women, of white power over dissenting Natives. As I write, the racist system of power has failed to silence me; proof of their failure is the very existence of this article. Obviously, to me and many other Hawaiians, resistance is worth the struggle.

### Notes

In this article, the author uses Native and Native Hawaiians as national designations, thus the term is capitalized.—Editor

1. For a discussion of the role of the United States government in the overthrow of the Hawaiian government, see the massive study made by President Cleveland's emissary, James H. Blount, sent to Hawai'i to investigate the sentiments of the Hawaiian people and the culpability of the U.S. government.



*Report of the Commissioner to the Hawaiian Islands*, U.S. 53rd Congress, Ed. Sess., 1894-1895, House of Representatives, Washington D.C., Government Printing Office.

2. See Noel Kent, *Hawai'i: Islands Under the Influence* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), pp. 95-188. Hawai'i has the largest concentration of U.S. military relative to its land base of any American state. Nearly 30 percent of the major island of O'ahu is controlled by the military, and other bases exist on the neighbor islands. The smallest of the major islands, Kaho'olawe, is entirely controlled by the military which used it for bombing practice from 1941 until 1991.
3. For conditions of Hawaiians during the Territory, including official suppression of Hawaiian language, see the *Native Hawaiians Study Commission Report*, Volume One (Honolulu: 1983) pp. 99-197.
4. See Kent, above. Also see, George Cooper and Gavan Daws, *Land and Power in Hawai'i* (Honolulu: Benchmark Books, 1985) for a lengthy exploration of post-plantation Hawai'i and its rush to resort development.
5. Hawai'i has almost reached the seven million mark for tourists annually. Of these about 1.5 million are Japanese visitors, most of the remainder are American. There are thirty times more tourists in Hawai'i in a given year than there are Native people. Native Hawaiians now have the worst health profile in the State of Hawai'i, the highest unemployment rate, the lowest educational attainment, and make up over 75 percent of the male prison population. The conditions of our people are similar to that of American Indians.
6. See my article "Colonization, and De-Colonization in Hawai'i," in *Class and Culture in the South Pacific*, Ed. Antony Hooper (Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, Fiji, 1987), 154-174.
7. For a recent overview of nationalist movements in the Pacific Islands, including Hawai'i, see my "Politics in the Pacific Islands: Imperialism and Native Self-Determination," *Amerasia Journal* 16:1 (1990): 1-20.
8. See an incisive article by Ralph Steuber, "Twentieth-Century Educational Reform in Hawai'i," *Journal of the College of Education*, University of Hawai'i at Manoa 20:4 (1981). Steuber writes that schooling in Hawai'i is "a tiny but significant part of the total impact of western and American imperialism in the Pacific." According to the University of Hawai'i Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) office, there were thirteen tenured Hawaiian faculty and 660 tenured *haole* faculty in 1989. The underrepresentation of Hawaiians on the faculty has remained the same for twenty years.
9. Frantz Fanon, to me, has much to say about the effects of colonial education. He writes, "Colonialism is not satisfied with merely holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today" *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 210.
10. See John Toland's account of what Hitler thought of America's extermination of the "red savages," in *Adolf Hitler* (New York: Doubleday, 1976), 702. Also

see Richard Rubenstein, "Afterword: Genocide and Civilization" in Isidor Wallimann and Michael N. Dobkowski, eds., *Genocide and the Modern Age: Etiology and Case Studies of Mass Death* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1987), 288.

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