



Freedom's Racial Frontier

*African Americans in the
Twentieth-Century West*

Edited by Herbert G. Ruffin II and Dwayne A. Mack

Foreword by Quintard Taylor

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15 Kama'āinas and African Americans in Hawaii

*Making Sense of the Black Hawaiian Experience
with Dr. Kathryn Waddell Takara*

Herbert G. Ruffin II and Kathryn Waddell Takara

The following oral history encompasses black Hawaiian history and culture based on the testimony of black Hawaiian scholar Kathryn Waddell Takara. Herb Ruffin conducted this interview by phone on September 4, 2015. This unique history begins with Takara's youth in Jim Crow Tuskegee, Alabama. In 1959, as one of the few black students to attend the Quaker-run George School near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, she began acquiring the ability to function as a dignified black person in white-majority spaces. Here she met future Black Panther Party leader Kathleen Cleaver and followed in the footsteps of another freedom rights movement activist, Julian Bond. In 1962, during the height of the civil rights movement, Takara attended Tufts University, and in the following year she met her husband during a civil rights movement North-South student exchange at the Tuskegee Institute. Her passion for justice deepened after 1966, starting with the death of her cousin, civil rights leader Samuel "Sammy" Leamon Young Jr. While she was a UC Berkeley graduate student, her relationship with Cleaver deepened, and she and her husband allowed the Panthers to use their Oakland home as a safe house. With the urban crisis close at hand, the Takaras envisioned their freedom dreams being fulfilled abroad, and in a sense they made it halfway there: obtaining living-wage employment led to their decision to move to Hawaii in 1968.

In Hawaii, Takara immediately discovered that disempowerment of black people as a group and erasure of their collective present and past were typical of Hawaii's history and culture. Instead she found blackness in the Hawaiian Consciousness Movement of the late 1960s and the 1970s, a Hawaiian independence and cultural renaissance movement patterned in part on the Black Panther movement. She also found blackness addressed by people like local

African American journalist and labor activist Frank Marshall Davis, and Barack ("Barry") Obama's white grandfather, Stan, who understood that in order for Barry to remain principled on the mainland, he would have to be prepared for that experience in Oahu by understanding what it meant to be a stereotypical black man in America.

In 1971, Takara started producing knowledge on black Hawaiians as a University of Hawaii professor, scholar, and public historian. She has been responsible for uncovering the histories of many black Hawaiian, including Betsey Stockton, Wendell F. Crockett, and Alice Augusta Ball, who has a state holiday named after her. For Takara, in order for Hawaiian and U.S. West scholarship to evolve, scholars must begin intersecting new fields and ignored experiences, such as Africana studies and histories beyond the mainland United States—in Melanesia and Polynesia, for example. For persons of African descent this includes a rich black past that dates back to the reign of the first Hawaiian king, Kamehameha I (1782–1819), if not before.

Interview with Kathryn Waddell Takara

Herbert G. Ruffin II (HR): Who is Kathryn Waddell Takara?

Kathryn Waddell Takara (KT): I am from a long line of Tuskegee, Alabama, folk. Also, the other side of the family is kind of a Louisiana, Texas, Ohio line. I was born and raised in 1943 in Tuskegee, educated at Chambliss Children's House, the lab school to Tuskegee Institute, up to through my first year of public high school, when we had secondhand books passed over from the white schools and lagging enrollment of students due to planting and harvest seasons when many students had to work with their sharecropping families and missed a lot of school. My parents decided at that time to send me away to prep school in 1959 to acquire a first-rate education, which they both felt was necessary to my success as a black child. It was just when school integration was trying to happen but hadn't yet in Alabama. So I went to a Quaker boarding school in Pennsylvania. Before that I think I was fairly well prepared by going to the lab school at Tuskegee. My parents were both educators. My mother taught French [and] German and my father was a cofounder of the veterinary school and was a veterinarian. So I grew up with this intellectual setting all around and poor rural setting close by in Macon County, which was about 80 percent black in those days. When I went to the George School—where Julian Bond had attended a few years before me—I found myself in a sea of whiteness that I hadn't had contact with before. At that time, my feeling and view of whiteness was scary:

southern white power and violence. So here I was in this school with a lot of elite people's kids, and I had to make this adjustment from an all-black community to an all-white community.

Fortunately I had an English teacher at George School who encouraged me to write. I must add that I had begun journal writing during my earliest of years, when my mother would give me a diary each year for my birthday, and every day she encouraged me to write. Then I was encouraged by this teacher of English, Ken Keskinin, who told me, "You must write your stories." Because I was so homesick—I had seen so much already in the Deep South, and did yet not have my voice—I began to write stories, which was the foundation for my being a writer today. Meanwhile, I should mention that by the time I was four or five years old, not only did I know I was black and different from other people not in our community, but I had internalized other things about us as a group, such as that black people were ignorant, ugly, irresponsible, and inferior, which informed my being, despite my parents' and community's teachings to the contrary. Jim Crow was a powerful influence in our lives, minds, and sometimes our bodies.

The Quaker boarding school that I attended in my teens was in Pennsylvania in Bucks County. That was a good segregated train ride away, overnight. Social acceptance throughout my educational experiences was always an issue. Academic success and holding school offices, being in clubs, and on committees were not a problem, and I could excel, but because I was the only visible black, except for the kitchen help, when it came to anything like dating or visiting students' homes on long weekends and holidays, I was lonely. I did not get asked out on dates, and from high school through most of college that was always a big issue, especially when invitations were made and rescinded by parents of students. I completed my high school education at George School. During that time, the school's admission policy seemed to be that they would have one black student at a time or two, and there were some very distinguished people, including Julian Bond, Kathleen Neal Cleaver, and the son of the Chief Anderson who trained the Tuskegee airmen. That was its own kind of influence.

On to college at Tufts University, where I thought I wanted to study to be a doctor but not a veterinarian like my dad. Nor did I want to be a French and German professor like my mom. After my first year at Tufts, I went to France for a summer study program, lived with a French family in southern France, and felt free from prejudice, segregation, and discrimination for the first time in my life. I decided then that I would become a French major. I changed my major from pre-med to French because essentially I did not want to live in the

United States. When I returned to Tufts in 1962, the civil rights movement was heating up and getting really active.

In 1963, during spring break, I met my future husband, a white student at Wesleyan, who was at Tuskegee for a civil rights, North-South student exchange along with some other Wesleyan students. When I returned to Tufts and when he returned to Wesleyan, he called me, and we dated. We fell in love and got married after a year or a year and a half. I think I wanted to get out of the dormitory and the feeling of being an outsider. We were idealists, but also marriage took me away from the campus, the campus activities and feeling alienated. And I could develop my identity more on my own without always waiting to be accepted, welcomed, or invited someplace. I valued the courses that I was taking and the knowledge they provided.

In 1965 I was awarded a Fulbright fellowship, and we went to Bordeaux, France, where I translated West African and Caribbean poetry from French to English for one year and learned of the diaspora and themes of racism, colonialism, and struggles on an international stage. While in France, on January 3, 1966, my first cousin, Sammy Younge, a brother to me since I was an only child, and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and Tuskegee Institute Advancement League activist, was shot in the head and killed in Tuskegee while trying to use a white bathroom. I was heartbroken and angry. Then my husband and I both got accepted to UC Berkeley, and so we went there for graduate school in 1966.

However, let me just interject that my husband's father . . . disowned him for marrying me but finally accepted him and me back into the family once we had a child. But he was full of hate. We had to keep him from the wedding because he threatened to come and kill us. We had to have some guards.

[The era of] 1966–68 at Berkeley was a very exciting time! Intellectually it was the Free Speech Movement. It was the creation of black studies, ethnic studies, the Weathermen, SDS, the United Farm Workers, antiwar protests, teargas. Everything was happening there, so it was a very exciting and mesmerizing time. I re-hooked up with Kathleen Neal Cleaver, whom I knew from Tuskegee. The Black Panther connection—its issues, community programs, and the police, in spite of my white husband—became a real force in our lives.

Inside Berkeley we received no static. We lived in Oakland. I wasn't on campus except for classes and student rallies. I got pregnant my second year, while I was teaching French as a teaching assistant, and had my first child.

HR: Did you live in the hills or did you live in the flatlands?

KT: We lived in the flatlands on Sixty-Second Street below Telegraph. We also lived in another community. The second year we lived on Delaware Street a half-block from San Pablo.

Black Migration and Settlement

HR: Can you briefly connect your story into this description of the black migration and settlement to Hawaii with emphasis on that post-1966 time period?

KT: Yes. With all the demonstrations, antiwar, as well as the Black Panther Party getting attacked by police officials—I mean the shoot-outs and all of that—security felt very precarious. Actually our house was kind of a safe house twice when people were on the run, which was interesting and very much on the edge. As I mentioned, I got pregnant. It was going to be a biracial child. We decided that we wanted to live out of the country again. So applications were made to Africa and various international agencies and Hawaii. Hawaii was the first job acceptance that came through. In 1968, when we arrived in Hawaii, my husband had a teaching job at Iolani School, which was primarily an Asian American prep school, although its diversity has greatly expanded since then. It was next to the Punahou School in terms of its elite reputation. We moved into the Honolulu community and had a bit of trouble finding housing. I think due to discrimination against blacks. We had our social activities through Iolani School. I quickly concluded I didn't like it here at all. I didn't like it because there was no visible black community except in the military, and our numbers in the Islands were about 2 to 3 percent. There also seemed to be a limited awareness of some of the race, ethnic, and class issues that I been involved with in Berkeley.

I found a group of progressive lawyers, ministers, and other types of activists. But the issue was more the Hawaiian Consciousness Movement and a cultural renaissance. What surprised me was that the Hawaiian activists, who were protesting when I arrived here in the late 1960s and early '70s, wore the black berets, the black leather jackets (even though it's hot here), and the black outfits modeled after the Black Panthers. They were also aware of their concerns and issues like the feeding project, the home project, the free stores and poverty, colonialism, imperialism, demonstrations, revolutionary rhetoric, and things like that. They were aware and outspoken. They were trying to stop land development over the local way of farming, the loss of Hawaiian lands, the loss of local power to mainland developers, corporations, and all of that. I hooked up with that movement and the antiwar movement because there wasn't really a black

movement. When I got on it, I created some cultural and educational events to educate the larger community as to who black people are.

One of the events that I created was . . . titled "Blacks in Chinatown." It wasn't based on history. I organized and produced it at the Chinese Cultural Plaza in downtown Honolulu. And that was a month of activities that included our local black artists and intellectuals, as well as our social clubs who sponsored various events like a fashion show, hair braiding, talent, et cetera. That was a huge undertaking for me. I would say that was one of my bigger organizational projects, and when I became employed at the University of Hawaii at Manoa (UH) that experience served me well. I was able to organize and produce several national conferences and events at the university with outstanding African American intellectuals.

HR: When were you hired by the UH?

KT: I was hired part time at the University of Hawaii in 1971, full time in 1989, and stayed until I retired early in 2007. I spent my early years part time as a lecturer and as an instructor in French and ethnic studies. At that time, the university did not have a full-time tenure track position in ethnic studies for black studies. It took fighting by me and people in the community, as well as some administrators, to get that set up in 1989. I was a very popular teacher but also very outspoken. At UH, I never got tenure. I transferred to [the] Interdisciplinary Studies [Program], where I continued to create more courses on black and African studies, a total of six different courses.

This invisibility and political control is very typical of Hawaii's black history. Another example: There was a black man named English Bradshaw who was living here in the late 1960s. He got together with a Japanese professor named Dennis Ogawa, and they were the founders of the Ethnic Studies Program (now a department) in 1969 or 1970. Bradshaw approached me and asked me if I would be interested in teaching a course or two in black studies. I was eager and still hurt and angry after the death of my cousin Sam. I knew black history, made a solid proposal, and I got hired in '71 as an instructor of black studies. I had many students, sometimes seventy in a class in those early days, and great student evaluations up until the time of my retirement. My point is that Bradshaw was/is never credited for his role in establishing [the] Ethnic Studies [Program] at the university with Dennis Ogawa.

HR: How many persons of African descent were on the faculty?

KT: At that time, in the 1970s to '90s, there might have been two or three professors in the College of Arts and Science at the main campus and a very few in the

specialty schools. To this day, according to professor friends on campus, there probably are no more than eight black professors in arts and sciences, and not all are tenured.

HR: Is this institutional?

KT: Yes. I say it's that they don't recruit blacks, and that committees hire people that they know or friends of people that apply and are recommended. You know, it's an island. Those professors who went to Yale, they'll hire someone from Yale. I was never let in on the search teams, although I requested it. They had a program for exchanges with different colleges on the continental U.S. or the mainland, and I said that was a great place to recruit, because there were a few HBCUs [historically black colleges and universities] on the list who were available to participate in that program. I suggested that we could do active recruitment and add some other HBCUs to the list, or look at colleges and universities that had high black enrollment. But my ideas never went through.

When I arrived in 1968, . . . I found an active antiwar movement and a spreading Black Power (power to the people) movement. These attitudes were playing out in the military [in] black soldiers who had been to Vietnam and who felt they were still not being treated equally. Shortly thereafter, there was a small uprising at the Kaneohe Bay Marine Corps Air Station. I got involved with the black soldiers who were disproportionately incarcerated in the brig for often-minor infractions. A group of concerned civilians organized a group called CORPAS to deal with some of these issues and met with the admirals and commanders et cetera to help get some of these young men out of the brig. I worked with another black woman, named Cass Burnett, and some local residents. As a result of that involvement, Cass Burnett, I, and members of CORPAS started a small black cultural center, the first of its kind to my knowledge. It was located in Waikiki. We could only have access to the donated space on Sunday afternoons as it was used for a clinic the rest of the week. We provided a space for black military and others, and there was always a small crowd, from ten to twenty people, mainly military who would come together to discuss issues of the day and socialize. We had a small portable library. We cooked and offered free soul food. Sometimes there would be a speaker. We had music. It was a place where soldiers could see and meet with other community black folks in town and off base. That was the first black cultural center here in the islands.

Once I started teaching black studies, a woman in my very first class mentioned that Frank Marshall Davis lived in the islands and asked if I would like to meet him. Frank Marshall Davis was a writer who was included in an anthology that

I was teaching at the time. I learned soon thereafter that he had not only been a poet but an outstanding journalist and labor activist concerned with issues of race and class. I began my weekly visits with Frank Marshall Davis in 1972, which continued until his death in 1987. I eventually did my PhD research and dissertation on Davis, another sad story of an illustrious black man in Hawaii who has been overlooked and forgotten—that is, until President Obama was elected. I'll just slip this in here: . . . I never met President Barack Obama, but I did meet his grandfather, Stan. His grandparents were helping to raise him while he attended Punahou, and his grandfather was best friends with Frank Marshall Davis. Davis was unique and lived in Waikiki at the time. His door was always open. He had jazz, books, and always had the news on. He was a great conversationalist and an intellectual. Stan recognized that Davis was a black intellectual devoted to social change and black culture, and I think he wanted to expose Barry [Barack Obama] to such a strong, influential, principled black man. There were surely a few other black intellectuals around, but they were tucked away in the military, or maybe Stan just did not have access to them.

Early Publications, Stories, and Race Relations

KT: I am going to put a pause in my talking about myself in Hawaii and move back to 1975, when I was asked to contribute a piece to a book called *Montage: An Ethnic History of Women in Hawai'i*. I was asked to contribute to the black component. I wrote a piece, "Who Is the Black Woman in Hawai'i?" It was published in 1977.

Before the publication of *Montage* by the University of Hawaii in 1971, I was interviewed for an article that was published in *Honolulu Magazine*. It was called "To Be Black in Paradise: The Myth of Racial Harmony in Hawai'i." A lot of the information that I shared in that article, I would say is still very correct. *Honolulu Magazine* is one of the most sophisticated, picturesque, and classy magazines here in the islands, not counting the literary journals. After publication of the interview, in the letters to the editor, people would say things like, "Well, why doesn't she go back to where she came from?" and "We don't have prejudice here."

The one thing that people who live in Hawaii should know is that it is offensive to many Hawaiians by blood and culture to call the local residents and immigrants Hawaiians. So we refer to each immigrant ethnic group by their place of origin or as local, particularly due to the large amount of interracial marriages. I wanted to make that distinction from Native Hawaiians, even when you said "black Hawaiians" for blacks who were born and raised in the Islands. Better to

say "Hawaii blacks" unless one of the parents is of Hawaiian blood. It's a very sensitive and respectful way of talking and writing about the diverse people who live here. If they are people who have come here and lived here a long time like me, we are called "*Kama'āina*." If people are born here and mixed-race with Hawaiians, then they are black Hawaiians or just Hawaiian. Otherwise, it's "blacks in Hawaii" or "African Americans in Hawaii" or "black residents of Hawaii" or "black families." The term "Hawaiian" is currently usually reserved for blood quantum, and it's a very touchy subject now since there is all this sovereignty movement, voting, protests, occupations, and all.

HR: Just to briefly break the train of thought, as you talk about sovereignty you mentioned leaving the mainland and said you and your husband were looking for a new place out of the country and mentioned Hawaii. What did you mean? Did you see Hawaii as a place out of the country, or were you talking about it in juxtaposition to leaving the mainland, continental U.S.?

KT: I think I was talking about mainland, but also that whole issue of having a nonwhite majority was attractive to both of us, although I knew very little about Hawaii except my hurried research at the last minute. It was the first job that came through, and we had just graduated. It was just over from California, so we made the decision to come here. The whole movement toward self-determination, nationhood, and all of that has become only much more active since I've been here. To the point now where they're protesting the observatories on Mauna Kea and Haleakala, the military occupation, and outside developments and destruction of agricultural lands. . . .

Returning to the issue of black history in Hawaii, I was asked to do this article for *Montage*, and what I found out was that I couldn't find anything about black women in Hawaii. We were totally invisible in history. I finally went to two main sources. One was the State Archives and the other one was the Mission House, where the writings of sea captains, sailors, missionaries, and settlers from the earliest of days of contact and relations may be found.¹ That is where I discovered nineteenth-century black history in Hawaii. The first woman that I found was Betsey Stockton, who was a freed slave from the president of Princeton University, Reverend Ashbel Green, who had recognized her brilliance and opened his library for her. She was caught up in the missionary fervor that many blacks at the period of time held and wanted to go to Liberia.

However, Stockton ended up coming to Hawaii in 1823 with the Reverend Charles Samuel Stewart family and friends of Reverend Green. After a brief sojourn in Honolulu, they proceeded on to Maui, which at that time was kind of a

real economic center of the islands, what with the whaling and shipping industry and expansionism of the United States. She quickly recognized that there were no schools for commoners on Maui. So she established a small school and had students composed mainly of just regular folk, whether they were missionary kids or local Hawaiian kids. She was very knowledgeable in English, math, Latin, and all of the basic subjects. She also introduced the notion of industrial education, homemaking, and manual arts and crafts. Truth be told, she only stayed in the islands for about three years, with this family. Then Mrs. Stewart got very ill, and the decision was made to return home. Stockton decided to return to New Jersey and help her. It should be made clear that the Stewards announced at her arrival that Stockton was neither a slave nor a servant, because many of the missionaries immediately wanted her to come and help them. But no, she was a teacher, she taught, and she was a Christian.

Stockton also met and became friends with an earlier black settler who had arrived as a whaler and stayed. There were lots of black whalers at that time. In fact, I would say that up until the 1840s, blacks who jumped ship in Hawaii and stayed became entrepreneurs, musicians, married locally and felt good living in the islands. However, after the 1840s, when a lot of whites, and many of them southern planters and plantation owners familiar with slavery, began to come, then blacks stopped coming in any significant numbers, a pattern that remained essentially until the turn of the twentieth century, when they arrived once more in the military. . . .

The next person that I researched was Anthony Allen, an ex-slave, who greeted the early missionaries as an advisor to Hawaii's first king, Kamehameha I (1782-1819). With this role he was given land, wives, and started a boardinghouse, farm, grog shop, and small hospital for black seamen, among other accomplishments. Can you imagine? We don't hear about this stuff. . . . Do not let me get fired up.

By the 1880s, as more whites arrived and became planters and advisors to the monarchy, they considered several groups, including blacks, to import for cheap labor, because the Hawaiians were not suitable and/or willing. It was decided on the Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, and the Filipinos in that order. The Asians were perceived as more passive, manageable, and thus more suitable for the job, whereas the lighter, more-European-looking Portuguese were used as "lunas" (or overseers) along with some native-born whites. I think that was because their skin color was white.

I would like to just make a small interjection, and that is: in Hawaii it seems like the politics of color still is very significant. I don't care whether you are

dark-skinned Hawaiian or a dark-skinned African American or dark-skinned Polynesian: I think that there is something associated with the stereotypes of dark skin and blackness that preceded us.

HR: Has it changed? Do you see any shifts taking place in the post-World War II era?

KT: Yes. There are shifts, but I would say with African Americans the stereotypes still surge subtly forward. If they don't surge forward, they continue latently in many people's subconsciences. There is more suspicion and reluctance to openly give "aloha" (i.e., affections, greeting and love) to African Americans. Especially, I think, due to the great majority of whites, some of whom (especially the older retirees) have definite attitudes about blacks and who have been settling here, perhaps to escape the racial tensions on the mainland. Part of it also might have to do with the fact that we have been so invisible in the history here. The numbers—we are around 3 percent; but with the re-categorization of the census—and the census has been a problem from the beginning—some early blacks were often categorized as Portuguese or "Other." More recently, those of mixed race do not own their African ancestry as much as their other ancestries. I'm certainly not talking everybody, but it seems to be a pattern associated with skin color that has continued after the Overthrow.

HR: What was the Overthrow?

KT: "The Overthrow" refers to the 1898 overthrow of reigning Queen Lili'uokalani and the Kingdom of Hawai'i by the U.S. government. At that time Hawaii became a territory. It was no longer a sovereign nation, and then it became a state in 1959. The longer that it was a territory, the more the stereotypes came. The stereotypes began with the planters. Then more were brought along with the Second World War in the 1940s by the soldiers because the military always has to protect its interests, and Americans had all these businesses over here, with the sugar plantation and the pineapple industry followed by tourism. The military has a huge presence in the islands, and although now there are black admirals, generals, officers, and even civilian employees, they are rarely featured or shown by the local media.

HR: How does what you are describing lead to the invisibility of black Hawaiians on the island from 1970 to the present?

KT: I will be very clear when I say "black Hawaiians"; I am meaning blacks who have been born here of Hawaiian ancestry. Likely the father might have been black

in the military, whereas the Hawaiian mother, as nurturer and culture-bearer, most likely raised them. That in itself is a problem because the general population does not know black history, does not know our successes and our contributions. So the children who are born of these marriages, I would get a few of them as students at UH. They mostly had no sense of their African American identity, history, or culture. They knew they were different. They knew that people would call them "big lips" or "dark skin" or "nigger." Or their friends would say, "You should be a reggae singer" or "You need to smoke weed because you belong with us." I'm talking black Hawaiian. The students that I had were ever so grateful, and I'm still in touch with them because they discovered another sense of identity through knowledge gained in my classes. Some became my teaching assistants.

When we're talking about the immigrants, I'll talk contemporary. Since 2007, [in] my connection to university students and with African American social groups—that includes the NAACP and the Links—. . . the women that bring their family stories do not differ so much from thirty years ago when it's still sometimes difficult to find a living-wage job. Part of this is surely due to not being local. If you live in the local community you're accepted, but too often this is somehow an exception to the larger African American group, because negative or limiting stereotypes are often hiding beneath the surface. Unfortunately the local media has been no help and perpetuated these stereotypes and exclusion. It's been very apparent in terms of excluding blacks [from] almost any kind of local ads or featuring our accomplishments here in the islands. We're not visible. In national ads, we're visible. In local programming and in local news stories, we are portrayed mostly in an unfavorable light, that is as criminals committing a crime, the homeless, or as athletes on the university teams.

We have many outstanding people, including black generals, black doctors, black inventors, CEOs, et cetera. However, I have only seen them rarely on the news, maybe once or twice. There are many black celebrities or blacks who are outstanding in other illustrious ways and who have Hawaii connections, such as basketball legend Kareem Abdul Jabbar and media mogul Oprah Winfrey, who both have a house here in the islands. But you almost never see our local broadcasters featuring them. They instead do stories on black entertainers who pass through. Whereas, if it's local talented or outstanding persons, meaning Hawaiian, Japanese, Chinese, or especially white Americans, you see them often on TV. Locals and visitors seldom see us. When I'm on the plane coming to Hawaii . . . if I sit next to some tourist who's coming to the islands for vacation, they usually might ask, "How long will you be there?" There is never the assumption that black people live in Hawaii.

HR: So that they just come and visit —

KT: The assumption is that we come and visit, and that blacks do not live in Hawaii and certainly have no history here, except maybe in the military. In recent years, black tourism has grown, but it's still negligible. Black visibility has also grown since my arrival almost fifty years ago. I've seen a black policeman or two. I don't think I've seen a fireman. I've seen certainly a few in the federal jobs, in the city and county jobs . . . and the state jobs, most often if they relate to social services. We're still pigeonholed. If we're going to do something it's in social services, social work. African American professionals? You don't see them on television, hear them on the radio, or being interviewed in their role as a professional, except in Black History Month. That time was when people would always want to interview me.

We did recently have a black man and woman sportscaster. But both have moved on. Aside from those two, I can't recall black people being visible in the daily media except in negative roles. Finally, my Links sister is the city editor for Hawaii's main newspaper, the *Honolulu Star Advertiser*. But again, you rarely see feature stories on local African Americans in Hawaii, except during Black History Month.

HR: So it sounds like coalition politics with a small percentage is very important?
KT: It is.

HR: In terms of institutions themselves and those people who are in power, I understand that there's a large Asian descendant population inside Hawaii. However, are they in decision-making capacities, or is there a disproportionate amount of whites who are in those positions?

KT: Definitely at the university, it's whites with some exceptions, although in tourism many hotels are Japanese-owned. The Department of Education [DOE] has been traditionally controlled by local Japanese, and there have been discrimination suits by blacks against the DOE. When I first started teaching at the University of Hawaii, there were very few Asian professors and administrators, and almost no Hawaiians. Now there are more Asian American and local educators included at all levels, with still not too many Hawaiian and South Pacific Islanders represented, except in the Center for Hawaiian Studies, which was created since my arrival. African Americans are barely visible at all levels. We have had two black chancellors of the community colleges. . . . But it's like our roles as professors and administrators are the exception, and the few black

people who are selected and rise to prominence sometimes don't have very "Negro" features and do not talk about race or rock the boat of the status quo and power elite.

HR: When you say "Negro," you're putting that in scare quotes, I'm assuming?

KT: Yes. I would like to add that there is another black man, Leon Richards, who was a dean at one of our community colleges. He has a PhD in political science, and he has been outstanding in building international programs. He was at one of the community colleges in a high position, but again there's usually that glass ceiling.

HR: I see.

KT: On one-to-one relationships African Americans do very well.

HR: One-to-one relationships?

KT: Yes. When just meeting people in the community, you often see a warm smile, you feel welcome and optimistic, but on a larger scale, the extended "aloha" so many people speak about and embrace, I think, has been absent or less open and visible for blacks. We don't have a mean police force, but we do have a disproportionate amount of blacks and Hawaiians in the jails and in the prisons. Even though African Americans in Hawaii have a higher degree of education proportionately than several other groups, we are more likely to be underemployed and even homeless.

Hawaii as a Racial Frontier

HR: What impact did Hawaii, and living in a place where people of color were the majority, have on . . . President Barack Obama's life? Is how he was raised a common experience for persons of African descent in Hawaii?

KT: The majority of our population here, which in 2010 was forty thousand, is connected to the military.² Of that population, I would estimate that 70 percent are military and their families. A few retire here, and many move on. There's a great turnover, which makes for a lack of continuity, status, and visibility. The transience of the black community is a hindrance, both politically and economically. What blacks bring to the islands culturally and historically, and how they raise their families, I would say is quite different than local people who have had their children here or even are born and raised here themselves. Black families who are long-time Hawaii residents or who have multiracial children have different sensibilities than their counterparts on the mainland. Barack

Obama's experience in Hawaii, and the kama'āina experience would be quite similar and typical. Their vision of the world would be more open, inclusive, multicultural, and probably even more economically diverse. Friendly, trusting, and giving are more the norms. It would be very different from the experience of an African American born and raised on the mainland, even in 2015. The environment of Hawaii creates a different kind of sensibility and a broader, more tolerant way of looking at the world.

I definitely think that President Obama's experience, both as multiracial and as a Hawaiian-born resident who attended school here in his formative years, was significantly different than what would be experienced on the mainland. I think he is more open to change, more open to diversity, warmer . . . more personal with people naturally, and less suspicious, with less armor around him than if he had been born and raised elsewhere.

HR: You're saying, I guess in an implicit way, that Hawaiians of African descent . . . are not living socially isolated lives?

KT: I think I'm saying that people of African descent in the islands may be less political and filled less with anxiety and despair. I think that all of them are aware of being black and what that means, that it's different and that they are unique in some ways. But unless the parents make a real effort to give them black history—and I think Stan, Obama's white grandfather, did this with Obama, cultivated him culturally through Davis's writing, through his politics, through his jazz, through his culture—I think that you have to make a special effort to ground African American children in their culture and history for them not to be indifferent to the value of culture and history in the formation of identity. It is an injustice to all to not expose children and students to political trends, the historical mistreatment of blacks, and racial injustice until they go to the mainland, and then, *Bam!*, they unexpectedly find themselves in situations for which they are ill-prepared, for Black Power and poverty and the rewards and consequences of all.

HR: It seems like a multiple consciousness has been occurring for most black Hawaiians?

KT: Yes.

HR: Can you talk about how with this background that you have just stated, how do black Hawaiians get to a point of not necessarily feeling socially isolated?

KT: We haven't had a Jack and Jill organization here in the past, but I understand one is being formed. But we do have the Greek fraternities, and we do have

the Links, the Masons, the Eastern Stars, and of course the NAACP, which was organized here in the 1940s due to discrimination and segregation on the military bases. All of these groups have activities that include children. All of these groups meet regularly, and several celebrate Juneteenth and Kwanzaa, so that the children who live in diverse neighborhoods can get a sense of black community at these celebrations. Residentially there are very few neighborhoods that have a lot of blacks in them here. The ones that you find where blacks live in the same town are probably located close to a military base. For example, in my little town here, an hour from Honolulu, there might be two other black families. I don't even know if they're families with children. I've seen a couple of other blacks at the local post office. In Honolulu you see quite a few black faces these days, but most of the time . . . they are military or tourists.

Kama'āinas

HR: Can you give us an idea about Hawaii's geography? How easy or how hard is it to go between the islands as you talk about these black people coming together?

KT: It's expensive. It ranges from \$163 to \$250 to fly from Honolulu, Oahu, to Kahului, Maui, round-trip. Maui has its own African American Association, and [they] do events. Actually, they just had a monument installed to honor black history in the islands. It's in a multicultural garden where all of the other ethnic groups, except whites, are present—although whites have become the dominant group both numerically and economically. We do have a monument in a national park area with names of outstanding blacks listed on it, like Nolle Smith, the Crocketts, Betsey Stockton, Alice Ball, McCants Stewart—names of black historical figures. That's a very good start. So geography, demographics, and transportation back and forth between the islands . . . I would say that most of the 1.4 million people who live in the islands, especially black people, live on Oahu, which in 2010 had a population of 953,000.³ Not including blacks who choose to not identify as African Americans on the census, as of 2013 in Honolulu County, Oahu, persons of African descent account for 2.3 percent of the county's population, which seems to be declining from earlier. Oahu has by far the greatest general and black populations out of the eight Hawaiian islands at 964,678 general and 22,246 black permanent residents.⁴

Every day I really rejoice when I see a black person working, for example, at a bank. I almost never see a black teller or manager at a bank because it's an island and they have these ways of inclusion and exclusion: "Who did you go to high

school with?" "Who can you call?" It's that way. Even though there are blacks that are born and raised here, very often they either become entrepreneurs, state or city workers, get sucked away to the mainland for work and more affordable lifestyles, or some get sucked into the alternative economy.

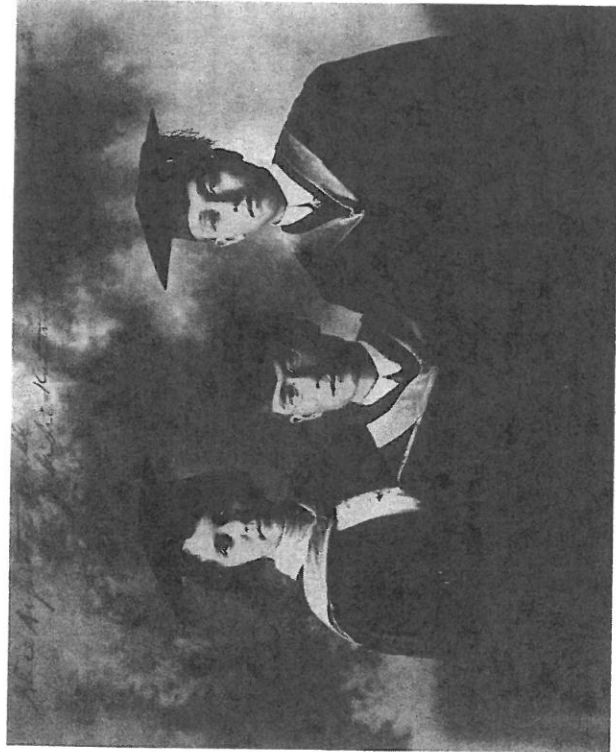
HR: Which is?

KT: Which could be illegal or non-tax-paying activities: drugs, prostitution, and other forms of trafficking, fraud, fugitives, et cetera. In terms of African Americans connecting with other blacks in between the islands, I've made efforts in that area, because I write about African Americans in Hawaii, give lectures and poetry performances, and I write about some of the outstanding blacks on other islands.

I did want to quickly mention Nolle Smith, who migrated here in 1915. He was from a Wyoming ranching family and had gone to college at the University of Nebraska to study engineering, math, and to play football, basketball, and track. From this experience he had met famous swimmer, surfer, and former statesman Duke Kahanamoku, who had said, "Nolle, you need to come over to Hawaii."

He came over here to work as an engineer with the Honolulu Department of Public Works. The following year he became superintendent of docks for Matson Navigation Company at Kawaihae Harbor.⁵ Then he went back to San Francisco and married his love, Eva Beatrice Jones, and brought her over here. He was quite the entrepreneurial type. He was the first one to organize the whole civil service system here in the islands from 1942 to 1946. He was also a statesman. He served in the territorial legislature. He had a big family. His daughters and son were all prominent. The girls stayed here on this island. The son became a cowboy, we call that a "paniolo," on the big island of Hawaii, and all of the children were successful. The grandchildren are still here. It's a very old island family. Nolle Smith. He was ambassador to Haiti. He was just outstanding and very strong.

Just about that same time there was a family, the Ball family. They were from Washington State. The father was a nationally renowned daguerreotypist who moved his family to Hawaii for health reasons. His daughter Alice Augusta Ball was interesting because she went to high school in Hawaii, then she went back to the state of Washington for college, and then she returned to Hawaii in 1914 for graduate school. The following year, she became the first woman to graduate with a Master of Science degree in chemistry from the University of Hawaii, which then, a land-grant college, was called Hawaii College. Alice Ball's research was on the awa plant and later the chaulmoogra tree and its possible cures for leprosy [Hansen's



College of Hawaii, class of 1915, including the first African American and woman to receive a master's degree from the college, Alice Augusta Ball. The other two graduates are Yakichi Kutsunai (center) and Tomoso Imai, both receiving bachelor's degrees. Courtesy University Archives Collections, Mānoa Library, University of Hawai'i.

disease]. She was hired to teach some courses in chemistry and work on this cure for leprosy, which was a big problem here in Hawaii in those earlier years. She was hired by the chairman of the Chemistry Department, Arthur L. Dean. He was her professor and her mentor. Ball invented a cure—I won't say it's a total cure, but before the 1940s many people say the "Ball method" was a cure for leprosy.⁶

Then, shortly after her invention, she died. She was working both at Leahi Hospital and on her research at the University of Washington in Seattle when she prematurely died in 1916 of mysterious causes at the age of twenty-four. My speculation is she caught the dreaded Hansen's disease. She got the pneumonia, which was a symptom of Hansen's disease. Her professor, Arthur Dean, took her work and continued to develop her research but never gave her credit, renaming the treatment the "Dean method." It was not until 2000 that she was fully recognized for her contributions. This, seven-plus decades after U.S. public health officer

Dr. Harry Hollmann publicly exposed the fallacy in Dean's claims, and fifty-plus years after a Japanese reporter published Ball's exploits for a Japanese newspaper and called her a black Hawaiian in the header . . . But she wasn't Hawaiian. She was an African American. In the late 1990s, I was asked by UH's Stan Ali to do further research on her. With his help, the University of Hawaii, myself, and other people who became interested in her story, we commissioned a painting of Ball, created a ceremony, invited residents from Kalaupapa (the old "leper colony" on Molokai), and planted a tree, the chaulmoogra tree, next to Bachman Hall, the administration building at UH. The painting of Ball now hangs in Hamilton Library. And the Hawaiian community began honoring Alice Augusta Ball after the governor declared February 29 to be Alice Ball Day in the state.

KT: The last black Hawaiians I will mention are an old island family called the Crocketts. The head of the family was Wendell F. Crockett. He was born in Virginia in 1859. He arrived in the islands as an attorney in 1901 with the first camp of black plantation workers, encouraged by the recommendation of Booker T. Washington. There were two separate groups of black plantation workers. The group that he was with went to Maui to a place called Spreckelsville Plantation.

HR: What type of agriculture was taking place on these plantations?

KT: Spreckelsville was a sugar plantation. Crockett came as a lawyer for the workers and later served Maui as county prosecutor. He had a wife who was very strong and very active. Her name was Annie V. Ryder Crockett. They came from Michigan, although they had spent some time in the South. They had several children, including Wendell Francis (Frank), who, after graduating from University of Michigan Law School, returned to Maui and became a renowned county prosecutor (1919–49), territorial senator (ca. 1950–54), circuit court judge (1959–61), and county supervisor (1963–65).⁷ Annie Crockett became a principal. She was one of the first people to invent hybrid hibiscus. She was very well respected. In fact, most of the older, black kama'āina families, such as the Crocketts, who have stayed here either became politically active or they were in law or in education—like Helene Hale, who was nominal mayor of the Big Island in the 1940s and later a representative to the state legislature.

Politically, before African American political party realignment from the Republicans to the Democrats began during the New Deal in the 1930s, most early black Hawaiian families were aligned with the Republican Party, still then resonating with faint echoes . . . of President Lincoln's freedom party.

Today black Hawaiians are 95 percent Democrat.

Miseducation (and Oral History as a Tool for Historical Recovery)

HR: In terms of oral history, what can oral history accomplish in uncovering the lives of black Hawaiians that previous methods could not?

KT: For as long as I have been in the islands and before my arrival here, there has been a strong and constant need for the Department of Education to include black history in their curriculum. Unfortunately, apart from a Martin Luther King Day or a Black History Month event or assignment, there is little information given by public school teachers, and little learning in the classroom about African Americans. I feel it is especially important to not just talk about black history on the mainland, but to talk about the vital history of blacks in Hawaii. So, bit by bit, more and more articles are becoming available on this subject. If blacks saw a long and distinguished history here by some of these illustrious people, there might be more of a sense of curiosity to come over here and get to be a part of the mix, because I think that all of these people, including myself, have found Hawaii a very good place to live, whether it is nature, climate, multiculturalism, diversity. What is missing is African Americans in visible roles in Hawaii [or a role] that has history connected to it that can help to dignify and celebrate our contributions.

HR: Do you think the cost of living in Hawaii is a prohibitive factor?

KT: Well, we do have a large homeless population over here, very disproportionate, that come from the mainland because of the weather. I think that people can live wherever. That might make it easier to decide not to come, but I think people can survive, and, if they are willing, to work and get that job, be it in whatever area, at the city, state, or the federal [level] or just become entrepreneurs, work in the professions, and as enterprising entertainers, such as Maya Angelou, who was a torch singer here for a while. This tradition goes back to the reign of Kamehameha the Great, who had blacks in his band. Those early blacks probably came to the islands on whaling or trading ships. Later, the Royal Hawaiian Band as it is now called, with black musicians at the time, went from 1836 all the way up until the 1850s, when it was decided by the white settlers and advisors to the king that the monarchy, with its palace and all the trappings of Victorian-style international rule, needed to have a "proper" bandleader from Germany to formalize the Royal Hawaiian Band. After the arrival of the new bandleader, you didn't see a lot of blacks in the band. Similar to most of black Hawaiian history, although persons of African heritage were the foundation and

beginning of the Royal Hawaiian Band, there is no public acknowledgment or celebration of this contribution.

Conclusion

HR: Closing out this wonderful conversation, what needs to change for future scholars and audiences to begin addressing the U.S. West beyond the mainland and to places such as Alaska and Hawaii?

KT: I think that the connection with the African diaspora, the modeling of Hawaii as a place where many cultures live together, play together, and work together, is important. I think Hawaii's connection to Asia is super-important. The challenges of our time and the twenty-first century are to see the connections and correspondences. Right now, Hawaiians are on a voyage of discovery and reconnecting with ancestors across the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, and down to Madagascar and on to South Africa, where they openly claim that they have ancestors. Truly a different paradigm to explore.

This concept of globalism can be a door opener as well as another way for dominance and colonialism to prevail. It is our responsibility to see what traces we can find of the African presence not only through India and through Malaysia but also all the way through the Pacific. Specifically, what about Melanesia? In Melanesia the people are very black. What about Fiji? People are very black. Interested scholars can contribute to a new paradigm that includes blacks in the West and beyond. I think that there is an urgent need for inclusion of blacks in American West history that becomes a global East. Connecting with the history and the oral histories of blacks in those under-explored sites of black history is a wide-open field.

Regarding future scholars, I think there is so much work to be done, and I think that Hawaii should have a center here for research of African connections to Asia and the Pacific. I made a proposal for that but just never got it done. I strongly believe that these links need to form. More research needs to happen so that scholars who are interested in a new paradigm of black inclusion and new ways of visiting world history can come from the mainland and Africa or other places of the African diaspora and beyond to study and research with a base in Hawaii. There are continuities and themes in art, cultural patterns, language structure, and spiritual practices that should no longer be ignored. And of course with DNA tests, the connections will become ever more apparent. Hawaii is the perfect base from which to launch new explorations and research, because it is an open field that has yet to be fully explored and developed. Imua!

Notes

1. Hawaiian Mission Houses Historic Cite and Archives, <http://missionhouses.org>.
2. U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, "Annual Estimates of the Resident Population by Sex, Age, Race Alone or in Combination, and Hispanic Origin for the United States and States: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2014," 1, http://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/census/popestimate/2014-state-characteristics/PEP_2014_PEPASR5H_all.pdf.
3. Department of Transportation Services, City and County of Honolulu, "City and County of Honolulu: Department of Transportation Services, Public Transit Division, Title VI Program Report," http://www.honolulu.gov/rep/site/dts/dts_docs/Part_I_and_II_-_Title_VI_Program.pdf.
4. U.S. Census Bureau, "2009–2013 5-Year American Community Survey," http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_13_5YR_Bo2001&prodType=table.
5. For more on Nolle Smith, see Miles M. Jackson, "Smith, Nolle (1888–1982)," *Blackpast.org*, <http://www.blackpast.org/aaw/smith-nolle-1888-1982>.
6. For more on Alice Augusta Ball, see Miles M. Jackson, "Ball, Alice Augusta (1892–1916)," *Blackpast.org*, <http://www.blackpast.org/aaw/ball-alice-augusta-1892-1916>.
7. Lynda Mair, *Wendell Francis Crockett* (Honolulu: Watumull Foundation Oral History Project, 1979), https://evols.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/bitstream/10524/48598/1/ocr_watumullohp_crockett.pdf; John William Siddall, ed., "Crockett, William F.," in *Men of Hawaii: Being a Biographical Reference Library. Complete and Authentic, of the Men of Note and Substantial Achievement in the Hawaiian Islands*, vol. 1 (Honolulu: Honolulu Star-Bulletin, 1921), https://archive.org/stream/menofhawaiibeingozsidd_djvu.txt, 116.

Blanche Louise Preston McSmith: An Alaska Civil Rights Icon

Part 5 of this book, "Reconsiderations," reexamines the U.S. West in understudied sites. One site is African American history in Alaska. In this essay, black West pioneer Albert Broussard examines the state's early civil rights movement and the important role that Blanche Louise Preston McSmith had in the movement and in Alaska's public life.

The black presence in Alaska has been severely under recorded. This is particularly the case for the role of African American women. One of the most remarkable black leaders was Blanche Louise Preston McSmith, a native of Marshall, Texas, who, like the majority of African Americans residents, migrated to Alaska to seek greater economic opportunity.

Born May 5, 1920, Blanche Louise Preston graduated from Wiley College in 1941 and eventually earned a master's degree in social work from the University of Southern California in 1944. Preston married Los Angeles businessman William McSmith and the pair owned a local electronics business and real estate firm. In 1949, Blanche and William McSmith moved to Kodiak, Alaska Territory and the following year, settled in Anchorage, the Territory's largest city.

Blanche McSmith played a major role in organizing the Anchorage branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1951. Under her leadership as branch president, the Anchorage NAACP in 1959 pushed for a comprehensive civil rights bill when Alaska was admitted to the Union as the 49th state. The new Alaska State Legislature, however, failed to support the bill.

In that same year, Governor William A. Egan appointed McSmith to fill a vacancy for the 10th District, Alaska House of Representatives when Representative John Radar was appointed Attorney General. Her service in the Alaska legislature gave her the distinction of being the first African American to serve in that body.

McSmith worked tirelessly both in and outside the legislature to end housing and employment discrimination in Alaska. Her efforts culminated in the adoption of a fair housing ordinance by the Anchorage city council in 1967.

Source: Albert Broussard, "McSmith, Blanche (1920–2006)," *Blackpast.org*.