Different Racisms and the Differences They Make: Race and "Asian Workers" of Prewar Hawai'i *

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ABSTRACT

In the past two decades, the scholarship on prewar Hawai'i, particularly of its workers, took a much needed critical turn toward the study of racial and class conflicts, challenging the long-standing dominance of the assimilationist framework. However, an anachronistic deployment of a pan-Asian racial category and an attenuated conceptualization of racism have impeded the turn, an important consequence of which has been an inadequate grasp of the racial inequality and division between Japanese and Filipino workers. I argue that a key to overcoming these shortcomings is the abandonment of a unidimensional conceptualization of racism that underlies not only the study of Hawai'i but also much of the sociology of race. Focusing on the 1920s and 1930s, this essay seeks to demonstrate why and how Japanese and Filipino workers faced different racisms, different not only in intensity but in kind, and what differences they made in relation to the production and reproduction of working-class racial inequality and division.

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Introduction

As even many outside the customarily insular walls of academia became aware through various mainstream news reports, including those in the *New York Times* and *Newsweek*, the 1998 annual meeting of the Association for Asian American Studies, held in Honolulu, was a particularly contentious one (e.g., Foote 1998; Kam 1998; Monaghan 1998; James 1999; Sengupta 1999; Orecklin 2001). The controversy centered on the association's literary book award given to Lois-Ann Yamanaka for her 1997 novel, *Blu's Hanging*. Set in Hawai'i, the book narrates, from the viewpoint of a 13 year-old girl, the story of her working-class Japanese American family on the island of Moloka'i surviving the death of her mother. The locus of the heated debate, a Filipino character in the novel is a depraved child molester who rapes his nieces and the narrator's younger brother. Protesters at the conference argued that the book perpetuated a racist stereotype of Filipinos and that the association should not give its seal of approval.[1] In the end, the association members voted to rescind the award.

Reflecting on the events of Honolulu shortly thereafter, Russell Leong, the editor of *Amerasia Journal*, wrote,

> At the association meeting, I commented during the public forum that the controversy over a fiction award was, indeed, not the complete story.
>
> As an editor and publisher, I saw the controversy as reflective of a much larger issue: that is, the second-class status of Filipino American Studies within Asian American Studies. (1998: vi)

With this essay, I suggest that the controversy was reflective of an issue even larger than, though inextricably related to, Asian American Studies, one that is deeply rooted in the history of racisms in Hawai'i. As Linda Revilla, a psychologist at the University of Hawai'i, notes, "This is how it has been for 90 years" (as quoted in Fujikane 2000: 175).

In this essay, I explore the historical origins of the inequality and division between the Japanese and Filipinos, focusing on the workers of prewar Hawai'i. First, the essay outlines the persistent racial hierarchy in Hawaii's plantation economy in the 1920s and 1930s. Second, I discuss why and how recent scholarship failed to apprehend the inequality and the concomitant division. Third, the essay argues that the qualitatively different racisms the two groups of workers faced lie at the heart of the inequality and division. Fourth, I chart the divergent and conflicting

[1] The intensity of the protest can be attributed, in part, to Yamanaka's having received the award in 1994 for an earlier book, *Saturday Night at the Pahala Theater*, that had drawn similar criticisms (Fujikane 2000).

historical trajectories of Japanese and Filipino workers before World War II. Finally, I conclude with the implications of discerning different racisms for understanding postwar Hawai'i.

Outline of the Racial Hierarchy

By the dawn of the 20th century, Hawai'i was a newly annexed territory of the United States, tightly controlled by an oligarchy of *haole* capitalists.[2] A small number of haole families owned and managed a heavily interlocked group of sugar agencies, commonly referred to as the Big Five, that wholly dominated the sugar industry and, later, myriad other industries including pineapple and shipping.

Native Hawaiians and migrants recruited successively from China, Portugal, Japan, and the Philippines provided the requisite labor. In the 1920s and 1930s, Filipinos and the Japanese – by far the two largest groups of workers – made up between 75 and 90 percent of the plantation work force.

When one examines the occupational structure of Hawai'i from the 1920s to World War II, a clear pattern emerges. There was a racial hierarchy with haoles, Portuguese, Japanese, and Filipinos occupying positions in descending order of power. Haoles were almost entirely confined to managerial and professional positions, and Filipinos were almost entirely confined to unskilled labor positions, with the Portuguese and the Japanese falling in between (Lind 1938b: 252). For example, in 1920, 42.1% of haole, 19.7% of Portuguese, 1.3% of Japanese, and 0.3% of Filipino employees in the sugar industry held low supervisory positions; the racial disparities were progressively further skewed at higher levels of management (Reinecke 1996: 144).

Although there was not a strict caste system with no overlaps in occupations, this racial order proved to be durable through to the 1940s, clearly illustrated by the data from the Olaa Sugar Company on Table 1; the largest plantation on the Big Island, the Olaa Sugar Company was quite representative of the sugar industry as a whole.[3] Although the figures for the three years are not strictly comparable, because the definition of

[2] *Haole* is the racial category referring to non-Iberian people of European origin. The Portuguese, the largest group of Iberian origin, have always been considered distinct from the haoles (see Geschwender, Carroll-Seguin, and Brill 1988; Jung 1999).

[3] The advantages of looking at this plantation are that, among the plantations whose records have been archived, its records are the most complete and that, comparing them to the less complete records of other plantations and of the sugar industry as a whole, the data are representative. For comparative examples, see Form 111, The Lihue Sugar Company, August 1930, LPC17/7, HSPA, and Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association, "Labor Report of All Islands," June 1944, PSC40/7, HSPA.

Table 1

Numbers and Percentages of Male "Skilled" and All Employees by Year and "Racial Ancestry," Olaa Sugar Company

	"Skilled" Male Employees			All Male Employees		
"Racial Ancestry"	1929	1935	1941	1929	1935	1941
Haole*	34	33	33	34	37	35
	24.6%	22.6%	36.3%	1.4%	1.6%	2.1%
Portuguese	43	41	18	109	119	88
	31.2%	28.1%	19.8%	4.4%	5.1%	5.4%
Japanese	**29**	**39**	**32**	**492**	**701**	**604**
	21.0%	**26.7%**	**35.2%**	**19.8%**	**30.0%**	**37.0%**
Filipino	**6**	**4**	**4**	**1,758**	**1,365**	**837**
	4.3%	**2.7%**	**4.4%**	**70.7%**	**58.5%**	**51.3%**
Others**	26	29	4	92	113	68
	18.8%	19.9%	4.4%	3.7%	4.8%	4.2%
Total	138	146	91	2,485	2,335	1,632
	100%	100.0%	100.0%	100%	100.0%	100.0%

* Labeled as "American" in 1929 and "Anglo-Saxon" in 1935 and 1941.
** Hawaiian, Puerto Rican, Chinese, Korean, etc.

Sources: Form 111, August 1929, PSC34/1, HSPA; Form 54, September 1935, PSC40/7, HSPA; Form 54, September 1941, PSC40/7, HSPA.

the "skilled" category changed slightly over time, they do capture the overall racial trends in sugar plantation employment.[4] As a comparison of the two sides of the table shows, haoles made up only 1.4% of all male employees but 24.6% of the "skilled" in 1929, a couple of years before the onset of the Depression in Hawai'i. This pattern of extreme overrepresentation of haoles in "skilled" positions held for 1935 and for 1941, three months before the U.S. entry into World War II. Though clearly not as disproportionately as the haoles, Portuguese men were also much more likely to be in the "skilled" category, as the percentages on the left are much higher than those on the right. At all three time points, Japanese male workers were roughly proportionately represented in the "skilled" category. Finally, Filipino male workers were vastly

[4] The broad category of "skilled" included not only skilled workers but also those in supervisory positions. The 1929 and 1935 data categorized the employees according to whether they held "skilled" or "unskilled" jobs. The 1941 data categorized the employees according to whether they held "skilled" positions paying at least $100 in monthly salary.

underrepresented in the "skilled" category; they were the largest segment of the work force but held the smallest numbers of "skilled" positions.[5]

Within the broad categories of "skilled" and "unskilled," a similar racial ordering prevailed in terms of occupations and pay. For example, the average monthly earnings of unskilled male sugar workers in 1939 for haoles, Portuguese, Japanese, and Filipinos were $76.00, $56.23, $50.94, and $46.92, respectively. And, the differences were even more stark, if the differential values of their perquisites, like housing, were considered (USBLS 1940: 52-53).

Available data bear out similar racial patterns in the pineapple and stevedoring industries. For example, in 1938, full-time "Caucasian," Japanese, and Filipino pineapple workers earned on average $1,131, $814, and $659 per year, respectively (USBLS 1940: 111); compiled by the U.S. Department of Labor, the earnings of haole and Portuguese workers were collapsed into one. Regarding stevedoring, the same report noted, "Among the salaried workers, exactly one-third (33.3 percent) were Caucasians and one-quarter Japanese. Filipinos had an extremely small representation in the salaried group" (USBLS 1940: 171).

Comprehending the Ongoing Incomprehension

In the past two decades, the scholarship on prewar Hawai'i, particularly of its workers, took a much needed critical turn toward the study of racial and class conflicts, challenging the long-standing dominance of the assimilationist school. Mounting this momentous challenge were two overlapping areas of scholarship: Asian American Studies, which explicitly centered their analyses on the islands' predominantly Asian workers, and Marxism, which provided a vital class-based critique of capitalism.

Given the promising directions and growth of the new scholarship, how do we then explain its ongoing incomprehension of the persistent inequality and division between Japanese and Filipino workers before World War II?

First, by unreflexively employing the racial category of "Asian" or "Asian American," much of the new scholarship inadvertently effects a double conceptual overextension – from the present onto the past and from the continental United States onto Hawai'i. As Yen Le Espiritu (1992) shows, "Asian American" as a racial category is a postwar construct,

[5] Though not discussed here, some of the other trends apparent on the table become clearer in later parts of this essay. For example, the number of Japanese workers in the sugar industry increased during the 1930s in response to the Depression and the move to "Americanize" the sugar industry with "citizen" workers. At the same time, the number of Filipino workers decreased, as the Depression and the Americanization movement combined to push them out of the industry.

shaped by societal discrimination, state practices, and social activism. And, as Jonathan Okamura (1994) shows, "Asian American" as a racial category is also a continental U.S. construct that, to this day, enjoys little currency in Hawai'i. Yet, many recent studies of prewar Hawai'i, particularly those by Asian Americanists, utilize an "Asian" or "Asian American" category as if it had existed and mattered. Edna Bonacich (1984) unproblematically employs the terms "Asian labor" and "Asian workers." Gary Okihiro (1991: xii) writes of "Asians" and of "anti-Asianism," of which the "anti-Japanese movement" – the specific focus of his study – is one constituent strand. And, John Liu (1985) explicitly imposes a two-tiered scheme of race and ethnicity in which Filipinos, Japanese, and other groups of Asian origin are ethnic categories under the umbrella "Asian" racial category. [6]

Hence, despite the fact that the historical evidence points to the consensus that Filipinos and Japanese viewed themselves and were viewed by others as constituting separate races, many analysts retroactively integrate them. Consequently, the prewar racial inequality and division between Filipino and Japanese workers receive scant and inadequate attention.

Second, many recent studies, particularly those by Marxists, theoretically foreclose the possibility that racism can materially structure class relations. Essentially keeping the classical base-superstructure framework intact, racism is treated as either "false consciousness" (Beechert 1982, 1984, 1985) or an ideological epiphenomenon of class dynamics (Bonacich 1984; Geschwender 1981, 1982, 1983; Geschwender and Levine 1983; Geschwender et al. 1988; Liu 1984, 1985; Takaki 1983, 1990). Thus drained of their explanatory power, the actual meanings and practices of racism evade analytical scrutiny (Jung 1999).

This essay contends that the racial inequality and division between Japanese and Filipino workers are comprehensible *only if* we examine the meanings of prevailing racisms and their practical consequences. And, such an examination, as demonstrated later, leads to a corollary argument: Japanese and Filipino workers faced *different* racisms, different not only in intensity but in kind.

As Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1997: 465) writes of the social scientific literature on race, the definition of racism has remained largely unchanged since Ruth Benedict's 1945 formulation: "the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group is destined to congenital superiority." While "nature" may have been

[6] "Asian" is not the only racial category exported to prewar Hawai'i from the present continental United States. The frequent usage of the "white" category likewise effaces the important distinction between the haoles and the Portuguese (Jung 1999).

replaced by or, perhaps more accurately, grafted onto "culture" over the years, Bonilla-Silva argues convincingly that variations of Benedict's definition continue to pervade the sociology of race and takes them to task for positing an "idealist view" of racism disconnected from the "larger racial system" (1997: 466-467).

To Bonilla-Silva's critique, I would add that the *unidimensionality* of definitions like Benedict's severely limits our understanding of racism: the presumed superiority or inferiority of a racial group in relation to another is thought to be the sole, or at least the solely relevant, dimension of racism. Here, the myopic focus of the sociology of race, from its very inception, on the Black-white dyad in the United States may have been a crucial factor, universalizing just one particular history of racism. So, even as the sociology of race increasingly incorporates the study of race relations involving other groups of color, racisms confronted and negotiated by them tend to be conceptualized as variations, or watered-down versions, of anti-Black racism.

A comparative analysis of anti-Filipino and anti-Japanese racisms in prewar Hawai'i fundamentally brings this unquestioned unidimensional conceptualization of racism into question. Anti-Filipino racism of prewar Hawai'i did indeed resemble anti-Black racism on the continent: Haoles, and others, constructed Filipinos as an inferior and semi-civilized race. However, the racism that developed against the Japanese was not structured principally along the dimension of presumed racial superiority/inferiority, although it was not entirely absent. The most salient dimension along which the Japanese were racially defined and acted upon in prewar Hawai'i was their presumed national loyalty/disloyalty to "America."

In the following section, I discuss why and how Filipino and Japanese workers encountered these different racisms, which also explains their racializations as distinct races rather than as one "Asian" race, and what differences the different racisms made in relation to the production and reproduction of racial inequality and division between them.

Different Racisms and Reactions

In terms of racial differentiations among workers, one of the least understood is the one between the Japanese and Filipinos before the 1940s. As already noted, most analysts tend to elide differences and subsume both groups under "Asian workers." Compounding this tendency is the relative dearth of studies of Filipinos, rendering their history more vulnerable to such elisions. Of course, the tendency toward homogenizing the experiences of Japanese and Filipino workers is not totally without basis. There was certainly a racial line drawn around Europe, endowing people

of European ancestry with a privileged – if uneven, as the Portuguese could attest – position vis-à-vis those from Asia. Not the least of these distinctions, all immigrants from Asia, unlike those from Europe, were denied the right to naturalized citizenship under the Naturalization Act of 1790. But, what have frequently been overlooked by homogenizing the "Asian worker" experience are the fundamentally different racisms faced by the Japanese and Filipinos.

The recruitment of Filipinos by the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association (HSPA) – the powerful decision-making body of the sugar industry – began in 1906, just four years following the end of the bitterly fought Philippine-American War, during which an estimated 250,000 Filipinos died (Francisco 1987). As cultural critic E. San Juan, Jr. reminds us, "the context [of Filipino immigration] then was the violent colonization of six million Filipinos" (1992: 47). The context for the immigration and settlement of the Japanese in Hawai'i was Japan's emergence as a modern nation-state and its colonialist projects in Asia.

Haoles in Hawai'i projected divergent racial imaginings onto a people colonized by fellow Americans and onto a people who represented an imperialist rival. As in the Philippines, Filipinos in Hawai'i were constructed as a "primitive" race "in an adolescent stage of development," not unlike Blacks on the continent (Porteus and Babcock 1926: 58-70; see also Anderson 1984: 12-14; Reinecke 1996: 3). The Japanese in Hawai'i were constructed as an inscrutable people beholden racially, and therefore inherently, to their nation of origin and carrying out its colonialist cause from within (Okihiro 1991: 80). So, whereas the haole racist discourse concerning Filipinos revolved around the unquestioned assumption of their racial inferiority, underlying the haole racist discourse concerning the Japanese were the dual fears that they were not racially inferior and that they were incorrigibly loyal to Japan. [7]

[7] For example, note the admixture of admiration for and fear of the Japanese "race" in Admiral Yates Stirling, Jr.'s remarks to an audience of *nisei* (second generation of Japanese origin):

> As you know, I am on record in an official report published by Congress in which I question…[your loyalty to] a nation different in many fundamental respects from the nation of your forefathers. In reaching this conclusion, my thoughts have reviewed the virility, pride, efficiency, and determination of the Japanese nation from which you have sprung….
>
> What other nation in modern times can point to the distinction of having risen from a small feudal island kingdom to one of the greatest commercial, military, and naval empires of the world in less than three quarters of a century?
>
> Gentlemen, when I questioned your loyalty to your new country, AMERICA, I did so because of this marvelous heritage of accomplishment, for if I were of your race,

The momentous dual union strike of 1920, in which both Filipino and Japanese workers participated, illustrates how the haole planters and the larger public conceived the two groups racially in dissimilar terms. The five-month strike involved 8,300 Japanese and Filipino workers on O'ahu, representing 77% of the island's work force. It was conducted by O'ahu members of two separate unions, the Federation of Japanese Labor and the Filipino Labor Union, with outer island members continuing to work and contributing their wages to the strikers (Reinecke 1979: 95).[8] The strike eventually ended in the workers' defeat with the planters making "no concessions whatsoever, either direct or implied."[9]

From the beginning of the strike, the HSPA adopted the interpretation that the "action taken by the Japanese Federation of Labor is, as we see it, an anti-American movement designed to obtain control of the sugar business of the Hawaiian islands" (as quoted in Okihiro 1991: 78). The two mainstream dailies wholeheartedly agreed with the industry's assessment of the strike. Drawing on and magnifying the public's preexisting fear of an imperialist takeover by the Japanese "alien race" and fusing it with the nationalist rhetoric of Americanism, the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* editorialized:

> The strike is an attempt on the part of the Japanese to obtain control of the sugar industry. It is in line with Japanese policy wherever they colonize. It is of a part with the Japanization of Korea, Manchuria, Eastern Inner Mongolia, Shantung, and Formosa.... They evidently fail to realize that it is one thing to bluff, bulldoze and bamboozle weak oriental peoples and another thing to try to coerce Americans. (2 February 1920)

Centered on the Japanese supposedly "blind loyalty to an autocratic government," the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* opined more broadly two months into the strike, foreshadowing the insistent anti-Japanese attacks of the next two decades:

> I would be most proud of the meteoric rise of the Empire of the Rising Sun, and be very loathe to forget that my ancestors were a part of it....
> ... how much more difficult is your task [of proving your loyalty] than if you were not the descendants of a powerful militaristic people... (*Proceedings of the Annual Conference of New Americans*, 1932, pp. 7-8, HC).

[8] Despite the better financed and organized Japanese union's support of the Filipinos and the two groups' mutual aims, "the two unions acted independently," according to Reinecke (1979: 101), and did not represent an interracial working class in any meaningful sense. Duus (1999) points out similarly that the cooperation between Japanese and Filipino workers was tenuous from the beginning and deteriorated further during the strike.

[9] John Waterhouse, presidential address, *Proceedings of the Fortieth Annual Meeting of the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association*, 29-30 November 1920, p. 8, HC.

> We come now to a fundamental and practical phase of the situation: Why does there exist, not only in Hawaii but throughout the greater part of the United States, a deep-running but unmistakable under-current of suspicion and distrust of the Japanese? Is it not largely because of the form, actions and attitudes of the Japanese government and the characteristics of the Japanese people themselves?... It becomes the duty of the Japanese in Hawaii, if they are really sincere in their protestations, to make an active effort to show themselves capable of becoming Americans, entitled to the manifold blessings of American citizenship. (27 March 1920)

The characterization of the Filipino strikers contrasted sharply. The planters and the mainstream press responded to them mostly with conspicuous silence. And, when not being ignored, they were portrayed as the misled followers of the Japanese, even though Filipino workers had been more eager to go out on strike and had actually done so before the Japanese workers. Casually calling them "ignorant," one paper wrote, "As regards to the Filipinos, there is good reason to think that they are mere catspaws, used by wily Japanese agitators to further the interests of the subjects of the Mikado" (*Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, 27 January 1920).

If the activism of Japanese and Filipino workers briefly crossed paths for the duration of the strike, they found their paths quickly diverging following it. The divergence had several probable causes. First, Japanese and Filipino workers did not share the same structural position in the plantation economy. Filipinos were relegated to the most menial jobs on the plantations, while the Japanese could increasingly be found in low supervisory, skilled, and semi-skilled positions. Second, having immigrated earlier and with a higher proportion of females, the Japanese were fast becoming a second-generation population and consequently a citizen population, while the more recently arrived and more male Filipino population continued to be disenfranchised.[10] Third, foreseeing a limited future on the plantations for themselves and their children, the Japanese were increasingly leaving the plantation economy to join the ranks of the petty bourgeoisie, non-plantation skilled labor, and independent farmers (Lind 1946: 17). More circumscribed in their opportunities, Filipinos remained overwhelmingly tied to the plantation economy as unskilled labor. Consequently, while the Japanese comprised 56.4% of all sugar workers in 1912, compared to 12.8% for the Filipinos, Filipinos outnumbered the Japanese by as early as 1922.[11] By 1932, Filipinos

[10] By 1920, 44.5% of the Japanese were already native-born, which increased to 58.2% by 1930. Only 11.2% of the Filipinos were native-born in 1920, which grew to only 16.6% by 1930 (Lind 1938b: 120).

[11] In 1922, Filipino and Japanese workers represented 40.2% and 38.5% of the sugar labor force, respectively (USBLS 1940: 34).

represented 69.9% of the sugar work force, compared to 18.8% for the Japanese (USBLS 1940: 34).[12] Similarly, while the Japanese made up 29%, Filipinos constituted 57% of all pineapple plantation workers in 1939 (USBLS 1940: 86).

In addition to these socio-economic and demographic differences, the workers' defeat in the 1920 strike and the employers' uncompromising anti-union stance undoubtedly discouraged the building of a sustained interracial working-class movement by the Japanese and Filipinos.[13] However, the explanatory power of these various factors, though certainly significant, remains insufficient, considering that they were still largely operant in the mid-1940s when an interracial working-class movement took hold.

For the Japanese, the most decisive factor inhibiting a sustained involvement in a working-class movement during the two decades following the 1920 strike was the ubiquitous anti-Japanese Americanization movement. Thoroughly melding race, class, and nation in regard to the Japanese, as evidenced during the strike, the haole-led movement effectively winnowed the range of politics in which the Japanese could engage, leading the increasingly *nisei*[14] citizen population away from class conflict and toward assimilationist politics.

In the name of Americanization, Japanese newspapers, Japanese language schools, and practically anything else Japanese came under intensified attack after the 1920 strike, resulting in a series of territorial laws governing their operations (Nomura 1987: 98). With the number of registered Japanese voters increasing from 658 in 1920 to 27,107 in 1940, becoming the largest racial group of voters, the voting behavior of the nisei was also carefully monitored, and any deviations from the haole elites' Republican politics were construed as racially motivated and anti-American. For the most part, the nisei did not deviate, with little mitigating effect on the continuing stream of accusations of anti-Americanism (Lind 1980: 99-102).

[12] The data for 1932 were only available for men. By this time, there were very few women working on sugar plantations.

[13] Resolved to act more in concert following the strike, the planters institutionalized standard paternalistic practices, making improvements in housing, medical care, recreation and other welfare programs (Okihiro 1991: 80-81). Of course, once established, the withholding of these "perquisites," including the immediate eviction of workers and their families from their homes, became a favorite, coercive tactic of the employers. Furthermore, the territorial legislature passed a series of repressive laws aimed at preventing and breaking labor organizing.

[14] The Japanese term, *issei*, refers to first-generation immigrants from Japan. The term, *nisei*, refers to their children.

While the assimilation of the Japanese was the purported goal of the Americanization movement, the ideology of Americanism was also adapted to segregate public schools racially. Those haole parents who could not afford to send their children to elite private schools successfully organized to set up publicly-funded "English standard schools," thereby preserving the "pure Americanism" of haole children (Okihiro 1991: 139-140). At the first one of these schools, only 19 Japanese children passed the English standard examination compared to 683 haole children during its first year, hence successfully replicating the racial segregation pattern of Hawaii's elite private schools (Fuchs 1961: 276-277).

With the racially charged 1920 strike serving as the backdrop, such issues concerning Americanization rapidly supplanted worker-led movements as the focal point of Japanese politics. In the strike's aftermath, any continued involvement in labor organizing by Japanese workers would have quickly drawn vehement accusations and suspicions of anti-Americanism. As a Japanese leader of the 1920 strike observed, "the Americanization movement swamped the Japanese" (*Nippu Jiji*, 7 March 1921, as cited in Beechert 1985: 212).

For the haole planters, who along with other haoles "thought of themselves as the only real Americans in Hawaii" (Reinecke 1979: 19),[15] a central aspect of the Americanization movement was to induce the nisei – the "New Americans," as they were euphemistically dubbed – to stay on or head back to the plantations as loyal, tractable workers. By the mid-1920s, faced with declining numbers of Japanese workers, the planters began to voice concerns about the "rising generation" of Japanese who "show[ed] no inclination of returning to the soil."[16] Such concerns became increasingly more urgent toward the end of the 1920s, as mainland exclusion movements and the Congress continually placed their only outside source of labor from the Philippines "in jeopardy."[17] For example, in a series of highly publicized annual Conferences of New Americans backed by prominent haoles and Japanese, the invited haole

[15] Employer documents adduce Reinecke's observation that the haoles conceived themselves as being exceptionally "American." For example, as noted on Table 1, the sugar industry referred to haoles by the "racial" label "American" in 1929.

[16] John Hind, presidential address, *Proceedings of the Forty-fifth Annual Meeting of the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association*, 16-20 November 1925, p. 9, HC. An industrial survey conducted by the sugar industry in 1926 concluded similarly that the industry should rely less on a constant flow of immigrant Filipino labor and more on "attracting native-born workers." Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association, "Confidential Extracts from Industrial Survey of 1926," dated 1927, p. 1, LHA.

[17] R.A. Cooke, presidential address, *Proceedings of the Forty-ninth Annual Meeting of the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association*, 2-4 December 1929, p. 7, HC.

speakers inculcated their "back-to-the-soil" message to the nisei audience gathered from all over Hawai'i.[18]

Initially, certain segments of the Japanese community criticized the planters' message, rightly viewing the plantations as not giving the nisei an equal opportunity to reach the higher echelons of management (*Hawaii Hochi*, 7 August 1928, 9 August 1928, 16 August 1928).[19] As the Depression and unemployment took hold, however, earlier Japanese criticisms gave way to guarded endorsement (*Nippu Jiji*, 18 September 1931, 16 November 1933; *Hawaii Hochi*, 8 December 1930, 22 November 1933; *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 14 March 1933). While the pineapple industry – producing what was considered a luxury fruit – was hit hard in the early 1930s, the sugar industry was relatively unscathed and continued to encourage the nisei to turn to it for employment. The industry's efforts took on added urgency when the Philippines Independence Act (Tydings-McDuffie Act) of 1934, as feared, cut off its only external source of labor. Faced with shrinking employment opportunities in other industries, the nisei turned to the sugar industry in increasing numbers; the percentage of citizen sugar workers, almost all of whom were nisei, nearly doubled in just six years, from 15.9% in 1930 to 31.4% in 1936 (Beechert 1985: 253).

The prominence of the anti-Japanese Americanization movement had an indirect but dire effect on Filipino workers. Not feared as an imperialistic threat and with no significant citizen population, Filipinos were initially ignored by and, during the Depression, victimized by the movement.

Viewed as naturally inferior and from an impoverished U.S. colony that served as Hawaii's sole external source of labor, Filipinos became synonymous with the term "cheap labor." That they were hired exclusively as unskilled labor and were not seriously considered for advancement into higher positions hardly needed to be justified, which became acutely obvious during the Depression.

As the pressure of unemployment mounted, the sugar and pineapple industries used Filipino workers as their release valve. For its part in dealing with the territory's growing unemployment problem, the HSPA repatriated 7,421 Filipinos to the Philippines between March 1932 and April 1933. In addition to ex-sugar workers, over 2,000 of them were "indigents, mostly…those thrown out of work by the pineapple companies."[20] The unemployment and repatriation of Filipino workers did not only result from their lack of seniority, certainly not in the sugar industry. With the

[18] See *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of New Americans*, years 1927-1941, HC.

[19] See also *Honolulu Advertiser* 7 August 1928; Dr. Harry I. Kuriasaki, letter-to-the-editor, *Hawaii Hochi* 13 August 1928; *Nippu Jiji* 6 September 1928; Nomura 1987.

[20] J.K. Butler, "Remarks before the Territorial Senate," 13 April 1933, HSC25/6, HSPA.

unquestioned understanding that American citizens – however contested that status may have been for the nisei – would bear as little of the Depression's effects as possible, Filipino workers were, as a matter of explicitly stated policy, being laid off from the sugar industry at the same time nisei and other citizens were being newly hired.[21] In the year preceding June 1932, the number of Filipino male workers decreased by 700 while the number of Japanese male workers increased by the same number.[22] A year later, the HSPA reported, "During the period from February 1 to September 30, 1933, a total of 2,600 citizens were newly employed on sugar plantations. During the same period 2,700 Filipino men returned to the Philippine Islands through the Association."[23] Furthermore, to secure the long-term employment of citizen workers, the planters – again as a matter of explicitly stated policy[24] – expedited their advancement, finding it "highly important to place qualified citizens in 'preferred' and semi-skilled jobs wherever possible."[25] So, Filipino workers who did not lose their jobs found themselves being passed over for promotions and confined to the bottom of the racial hierarchy.

Though facing a racism of their own, the Japanese were not merely passive observers in the marginalization of Filipinos. Ensnared in the discourse of Americanism, most Japanese shared with the haoles and others a common assumption, the assumption that American citizenship should entail privileges. With their racial identity firmly linked to establishing their Americanness, the nisei – "Japanese by race and Americans by birth and citizenship and nationality" (*Hawaii Hochi*, 2 August 1929) – not only formed a racial identity vis-à-vis haoles, who assailed their rightful place in the imagined community of Americans, but also vis-à-vis Filipinos, who were unequivocally imagined, and at times literally displaced, out of the community (Anderson 1991). Japanese racial formation during the 1920s and 1930s was a collective project of both longing and rebuffing.

When the HSPA announced its policies of favoring citizens for employment and promotions, *Hawaii Hochi* – a widely-read newspaper that

[21] Allen W.T. Bottomley, presidential address, *Proceedings of the Fiftieth Annual Meeting of the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association*, 17-21 November 1930, HC.

[22] J.K. Butler to all plantation managers, 17 August 1932, HSC25/5, HSPA.

[23] HSPA Committee on Industrial Relations to the president, trustees and members of the HSPA, reprinted in *Honolulu Advertiser*, 22 November 1933.

[24] Frank C. Atherton, presidential address, *Proceedings of the Fifty-first Annual Meeting of the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association*, 7-10 December 1931, HC.

[25] J.K. Butler to all plantation managers, 23 March 1933, HSC25/6, HSPA.

claimed to speak to and for Japanese workers and progressive causes – only questioned the HSPA's sincerity (19 November 1930).[26] As in the mainstream press, the negative impact that such policies would have on Filipino workers was not given much serious consideration. And, although discussions of citizen labor should logically have marginalized other non-citizen workers, like the issei, only the Filipinos were isolated as the category of workers to be defined as "not citizen" or "alien," revealing a distinctly racial logic.

Understandably most evident between the beginning of the Depression and the passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act, *Hawaii Hochi* intermittently adopted a racist rhetoric that combined arguments regarding the nisei's rights as American citizens and the imputed racial characteristics of Filipinos:

> Filipinos will eagerly avail themselves of every opportunity to grab jobs by underbidding the citizen labor.... That is the reason that thousands of our own people, Portuguese, Hawaiians, Japanese and Chinese are unable to work.... [They] herd together in little tenement rooms like sardines in a can, living in the barest squalor ... [and] save money on wages that would mean starvation to any American.... Things have come to a point where American citizens, born and raised here in what is assumed to be an American community, find that there is not any room for them in their own land because it has been flooded with recruited labor from an alien country!... Filipinos are of an alien race, of a stock that does not fit in with our social system.... (7 February 1930; see also 1 September 1929, 19 November 1930, 8 December 1930)

Accordingly, when Filipino workers at the Honolulu Plantation Company in 'Aiea walked out briefly in June 1933, *Hawaii Hochi* took a stand against the workers, while still insisting that the paper "has always supported labor in its rightful demand for a square deal." Applauding the plantation and the police for making it "evident to the agitators that such activities would be dealt with summarily," the editorial continued:

> We do not know just what complaints, real or imaginary, the discontented Filipinos claim to have against the plantations. But we do know that this is no time for defiant agitation and threats of strikes or direct action. And we believe that those who assume such an attitude should be promptly deported to the Philippines as undesirable members of our community.... Much of the distress due to unemployment and the burden of cost that it places on the community has been due to presence here of a surplus of unwanted Filipinos.... (23 June 1933)

[26] *Nippu Jiji*, the other major Japanese paper, took a more accommodationist position toward the haole planters. The paper's less vitriolic stance toward Filipino workers can be read more accurately as stemming from its favorable assessment of management than from a favorable assessment of Filipinos.

Although other forms of documentary evidence are relatively scant, expressions of Japanese racism against Filipinos were not confined to editorial pages. For example, some of the nisei delegates at the annual Conferences of New Americans characterized Filipino workers in similar terms, portraying them as befitting their menial positions on the plantations and the Japanese as being superior to Filipinos. One delegate from Wailuku, a sugar plantation on Maui, stated, "[W]e have certain types of work that must be handled by [Filipinos]; we Japanese citizens cannot handle those jobs." He further asserted, "[The Filipinos'] living conditions are not on a par with those of the Japanese…. Naturally until the Filipinos improve their conditions or get out[, social conflict between the two groups] will be a problem for the Japanese citizens to tackle."[27] Without a sense of irony, the preceding opinions resembled the ones espoused by haole workers in Hawai'i and white workers on the continent.[28]

Not surprisingly, Filipino workers did not attempt to form an interracial working-class movement with Japanese or other workers, aware of their uniquely disadvantaged position. Hit hardest by the Depression – being the first to be laid off in the pineapple industry and being cast aside as the Americanization of the sugar industry favored citizens – they embarked on a different course of action than the Japanese. Building "an organization leaded [sic] by the Filipinos and not the other races"[29] and "plac[ing] the responsibility for the unemployment situation in the Territory of Hawaii upon the sugar barons,"[30] Filipino workers mobilized on their own to revive the territory's labor movement, which had been moribund since the unsuccessful 1924 strike of Filipino sugar workers that had ended with the shooting deaths of sixteen strikers.[31]

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[27] *Proceedings of the Annual Conference of New Americans*, 1937, pp. 66-67, HC. Less restrained expressions can be found in Masuoka (1931). See also Lind (1938a) and Ozaki (1940). However, support for Filipino workers was not entirely absent within the Japanese community. *Yoen Jiho*, a smaller Japanese paper with a Marxist orientation, was a proponent of the renewed Filipino labor movement of the 1930s discussed later (e.g., 1 June 1937, 22 June 1937, 6 July 1937), a cause which a small number of Japanese individuals also surreptitiously aided financially (Hall 1966: 7).

[28] For example, *New Freedom*, a newspaper which catered to "Caucasian" workers and purported to be "devoted to progressive democracy" (Chapin 1996: 143), argued for cutting off Filipino immigration by similarly counterposing "little brown brothers and sisters" to the citizen "jobless" and by imputing various inferior traits onto the Filipinos (*New Freedom*, 25 October 1930; see also *New Freedom*, 30 November 1928).

[29] Espionage report of a Vibora Luviminda meeting held in Ahukini, 8 April 1938, LSC69/17, HSPA.

[30] Pablo Manlapit to the President of the United States, 28 March 1934, MQ.

[31] Regarding the union's insistence on Filipino racial exclusivity, see Claveria (1974: 2) and Damaso (1975: 1).

Protesting the high rate of unemployment, the high cost of living, and the lack of opportunities, over a thousand Filipinos gathered for a mass demonstration in Honolulu in 1932, at which there was a call for the rebirth of the Filipino Labor Union (Beechert 1985: 219). A vigorous attack by the Big Five subsequently interred the union underground, transforming it into a secret organization by the name of Vibora Luviminda. "Luviminda" is the nominal contraction of the three main groups of the Philippine Islands – Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao – suggesting a racial/national unity among Filipino workers. Also suggestive, "Vibora" was the nickname of the Filipino general Artemio Ricarte, a nationalist who, inter alia, had resisted American colonization of the Philippines.

In 1937, Vibora Luviminda initiated a strike on a Maui sugar plantation, which later escalated into a general strike of Filipino sugar and pineapple workers on Maui and Moloka'i. Although the strike ended with very few material gains for the workers, Vibora Luviminda did become the first plantation union to obtain a negotiated settlement.

Largely due to the forced secrecy of the organizing drive, little is known about the internal workings of the Filipino Labor Union or Vibora Luviminda. However, available evidence suggests that Filipino workers felt themselves to be uniquely discriminated against, discerning that they particularly "fac[ed] a miserable condition [during the Depression] due to the fact that they [were] not citizens."[32] In 1935, E.A. Taok, the president of the Filipino Labor Union, wrote to the President of the Philippine Senate that Filipinos in Hawai'i were "all the time subject of discrimination" and were treated worse than other groups.[33] This notion of Filipinos' being singled out for the worst treatment seems to have been a major theme in the union's organizational meetings. At a meeting on the island of Hawai'i, an organizer spoke to this theme, "The plantations should not treat the Filipinos lower than the other laborers, because we are just as good as they are." Explaining why they needed to join an exclusively Filipino union, another organizer received applause of approval from the workers when he averred, "[W]e Filipinos are capable of organizing our own union without the help of others.... There are many Managers who treat the Filipinos different from others. Why can't these Managers treat us right, when we

[32] E.A. Taok to the Territorial Legislature, reprinted in *News-Tribune*, 6 November 1933.

[33] E.A. Taok to Manuel Quezon, 21 May 1935, MQ. See also *News-Tribune*, 6 November 1933; J.K. Butler to all plantation managers, 2 February 1934, HSC25/7, HSPA; Pablo Manlapit to Manuel Quezon, 6 January 1934, MQ; Pablo Manlapit to the President of the U.S., 28 March 1934, MQ; *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, 14 April 1934; E.A. Taok to Manuel Quezon, 13 August 1935, MQ.

are just as good as the other nationalities. These people are treating us like mules."[34]

Conclusion

In the past two decades, studies grounded in Asian American Studies and Marxism revitalized the scholarship on race and class focused on prewar Hawai'i. These works did much to dispel the alluring image of Hawai'i as a Pacific paradise with little social conflict, which had too often held sway over their predecessors.[35] However, this advance has been stalled by an anachronistic deployment of a pan-Asian racial category and by an attenuated conceptualization of racism as either false consciousness or an epiphenomenon of class dynamics. An important consequence has been an inadequate analysis of the racial inequality and division between Japanese and Filipino workers.

In this essay, I argued that a key to overcoming these obstacles is the abandonment of a unidimensional conceptualization of racism that underlies not only the study of Hawai'i but also much of the sociology of race: the notion that the presumed superiority/inferiority of racially defined groups is the governing logic of all racist discourses and practices.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Japanese and Filipino workers confronted dissimilar racisms, which constrained and enabled their disparate politics. Imagining Hawaii's Japanese as racially loyal to Japan and its colonialist projects in Asia, the haole planters and the larger public interpreted their participation in labor organizing as inherently anti-American. In the wake of the 1920 strike, during and after which their loyalty to "America" came under relentless suspicion, Japanese workers withdrew from the labor movement for the better part of the next two and a half decades.

Having immigrated from a recently conquered and impoverished colony of the United States, Filipinos were constructed as an unambiguously inferior race by the haole planters and most other non-Filipinos. Though already occupying the bottom of the racial order, the Filipino workers' plight grew even more perilous when the Depression struck the islands; even the racially maligned Japanese participated in the unquestioning marginalization. From their isolated position, large numbers of Filipino workers re-formed the Filipino Labor Union and struggled against the haole planters on their own.

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[34] L.W. Wishard to Theo. H. Davies & Company, 1 November 1937, LSC69/17, HSPA. See also B.H. Wells to American Factors, Ltd., 20 September 1937, KSC27/21, HSPA.

[35] Liu (1985: ch. 1) reviews the earlier generations of historical and sociological studies of Hawai'i race and class relations.

The foregoing difference in the racialization of Filipinos and the Japanese structured, in large measure, the two groups' dissimilar, though not antipodal, sets of historical experiences that cannot be retroactively construed as having been commonly Asian. In the 1920s and 1930s, Filipino workers were never subject to anything like the fierce charges of anti-Americanism faced by their Japanese counterparts, and Japanese workers were not relegated indefinitely to the most physically taxing, least skilled, and lowest paid jobs nor repatriated like their Filipino counterparts.

World War II again highlighted the divergence in the two groups' experiences. Throughout the 1930s, when relations between the United States and Japan became increasingly tense, both those who doubted the loyalty of Hawaii's Japanese and the Japanese who asserted their loyalty posed the same scenario as the ultimate test: what would Hawaii's Japanese do in the event of a war with Japan?[36] In other words, leading up to World War II, both the Japanese and their doubters had constructed, in effect, a potential for a major contradiction in the racist discourse of Americanism: for both sides, a war between the United States and Japan would reveal the "true" loyalty of Hawaii's Japanese. By the war's end, Americanism as anti-Japanese racism crumbled under the weight of indisputable and irreconcilable evidence of Japanese loyalty, including a conspicuous absence of subversive activities and disproportionate sacrifices at home and on the battlefields.[37] Racial discrimination against the Japanese did not disappear at once, but it could no longer be exercised as flagrantly or be draped in the American flag. For the Japanese, then, "the war gave birth to a battle-scarred generation confident in their claim to America" (Okihiro 1991: 269; see also Nomura 1987). One such claim

[36] Sociologist Andrew Lind wrote in 1943, "The difficult situation faced by the Japanese in Hawaii in the event of the war had been anticipated long before the actual catastrophe occurred. For years the Nisei in particular have been told that they were 'on the spot'." Andrew W. Lind, *The Japanese in Hawaii under War Conditions* (Honolulu: American Council, Institute for Pacific Relations, 1943), p. 29, 56.05(2), WRD.

[37] One longtime resident observer of Hawaii's race relations wrote in 1946:

> In 1941 [the Japanese community's] wholesale internment was freely predicted; in 1943 threat of permanent relegation to "second class citizenship" and economic discrimination was still a matter of deep concern. By 1945 its splendid war record had won its acceptance even from those who still dislike it. The person who now talks publicly about the "Japanese menace" … is regarded as a "nut." John Reinecke, "Nisei in Hawaii's Trade Unions," *Pacific Citizen*, 21 December 1946, p. 27.

would be made by Japanese workers who, after more than two decades of absence, returned to a resurgent labor movement, a decidedly leftist one. [38]

In contrast, because the "Filipino question" had not been one of national loyalty, anti-Filipino racism was not fundamentally altered by the war and remained largely unaffected. Hence, when the sugar and pineapple industries recruited 6,000 workers from the Philippines at the end of the war through a provision of the Tydings-McDuffie Act, there were widespread public objections. Though partially aimed at the Big Five sugar and pineapple companies, the objections, as during the 1920s and 1930s, were directed principally at the Filipino workers themselves, who were characterized, once again, as ignorant, sexually threatening, and violent. An unpublished study conducted by sociologist Andrew Lind and his students at the University of Hawai'i found these objections across all non-Filipino racial groups. [39] Later, the 1949 longshore and 1951 Lāna'i pineapple strikes roused similar anti-Filipino reactions.

In the mid-1940s, Filipino workers, along with Japanese, Portuguese, and other workers, organized themselves into one large, left-led union – the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) – uniting a racially divided work force. Organized on the waterfront and on the plantations, they engaged in a consciously interracial class struggle. In the ILWU, Filipino workers found one of the very few organizations in Hawai'i that fought for their equality, if not wholly without conflicts along the way. [40] However, outside the union, the progress was much slower, as racial inequalities, including those between the Japanese and Filipinos, persisted and at times widened (e.g., Chang 1996; Haas 1984). In light of this history, Yamanaka's *Blu's Hanging* inflicted not a brand new wound but infected an old one.

Abbreviations Used in Notes and References

HC	Hawaiian Collection. Special Collections, University of Hawai'i, Mānoa.
HSPA	Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association. Plantation Papers. Special Collections, University of Hawai'i, Mānoa.
LHA	Labor History Archive, Center for Labor Education and Research University of Hawai'i, West O'ahu.

[38] Most claims, however, would be made by the expanding middle classes, particularly in the realm of liberal, but decidedly anti-left, Democratic politics (Geschwender and Levine 1986).

[39] War Research Laboratory, University of Hawai'i, "What People in Hawaii Are Saying and Doing, Report No. 7," 1 November 1945, 24.01, WRD.

[40] For an analysis of the development of Hawaii's interracial working class, see Jung 2000.

MQ Quezon, Manuel. Papers. Special Collections, University of Hawai'i, Mānoa.

WRD War Records Depository. Papers. Special Collections, University of Hawai'i, Mānoa.

SZ Zalburg, Sanford. Papers. Special Collections, University of Hawai'i, Mānoa.

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