

Hawaii vs. Hawai'i

Hawai'i is lo'i patches and loko i'a
Hawaii is single plant agriculture
Hawai'i is kalo and Hawaii is pineapple
Hawai'i is the sprawling Ko'olaus
Hawaii is the lost swamp of Waikiki
Hawai'i is the mana held in Kaho'olawe
Hawaii is the continuous bombing
Hawaii is the immigration of people for plantations
Hawai'i is the culture that nurtured them
Hawaii is the greed of Sanford Dole
Hawai'i is the grace of Queen Liliu'okalani
Hawaii is Tahitian dancing at a luau
Hawai'i is the revival of hula
Hawaii is the banning of the language and Hawai'i is it's rediscovery
Hawai'i is the summer sunsets and Hawaii is the pictures of them
Hawai'i is haies
Hawaii is skyscrapers
Hawai'i is the furthest remnants of Polynesia
Hawaii is the furthest reach of America
Hawaii was cultivated by a people who did not know the culture or the land
Hawai'i was settled with canoes
Hawaii was stolen with boats
Hawai'i is exports and Hawaii is imports
Hawai'i is finding things found nowhere else
Hawaii is bringing things needed somewhere else
Hawaii is tourism and Hawai'i is the dependency on it
Hawai'i is the acceptance of all and Hawaii is their displacement
Hawai'i is a subset of Hawaii
Hawaii is for sale, but Hawai'i is not
Hawaii is shallow like the beginnings of the ocean
Hawai'i's roots run generations deep
Who belongs to Hawaii?
Who belongs to Hawai'i?
The tail end of Hawai'i feeds into the new beginnings of Hawaii
The structure of Hawaii supports modern Hawai'i
There simply can't be one
Without the other

They say. I say. you say

Some people say

I don't belong to the open seas and tropical climate
That my skin doesn't reflect the sun's rays the right way
That my feet are too calloused for the warm walkways
My body too foreign to be sunkissed

Some people say

That I should find my way back to cold winters and barely there summers
That I should cross the ocean and find another place to call home
That my presence is not a necessity but more of a nuisance

Some people say

That the words auntie and uncle do not belong in my mouth
That I will never truly know this place
That I will never truly belong here

Some people say

That the cultures here have nothing to do with my own
That I will forever be ignorant to the people and this place
That my sympathy will never transform into empathy

I say

That I know this place to an extent
That three and a half years does not count for nothing
That while my connection to this place is small, it's still valid

I say

That I have worked my best to immerse myself
That every toe I dipped in the Pacific was another piece of myself I gave to this place
That I tried to fill every crack in the roads with a bit of my understanding

I say

That I am open to learning
That I take every opportunity to discover something new about these islands
That I'm not perfect but I will always strive to learn from locals

I say

That despite what some people say
I have been welcomed with open arms and warm meals
That I am not from this place, but I can be

I ask

What do you say?

Untitled

Sometimes

I watch the waves on the beach go in and out
I watch the kids run around on a once pristine lawn
I drive past the houses with stuffed garages and full lanais
I feel each bump in the road
I hear the Pidgin, the Japanese, and the English
I watch the Malasada commercials on TV
I sit in the traffic by Aloha Stadium on game nights
I taste the glaze of the Krispy Kreme from Maui
I drive up Tantalus and stare at the city lights
I inhale the scent of barbeques as I roll by with my windows down
I feel the distance between my collard greens and my friends' luau
I wonder what kind of curiosity led to the creation of the poi mochi donut
I watch in awe as kumu rewrites history for me
I see, I smell, I taste, I touch and I wonder
What would have been different
If history had not turned out the way it did
If it didn't work and weave itself between the boards of docks and the dimming lights of grocery
stores
If it wasn't noticeable in "da kine", present in "pau", and a cultivator of "shi shi"
If history could ever stand to be ignored
Would things be the same?
Would shaved ice taste the same without the election of Dole?
Would the tides still recede with the revival of the monarchy?
Would people still be homeless without pineapple?
Would there be buses without the Bayonet Constitution?
Would the islands be sustainable without Cook?
Would there be mongoose if Kaho'olawe was still intact?
Would the rail be in construction if the Hawaiian flag still flew?
Would people still be homeless without the Great Mahele?
Would the suburbs of Mililani still exist without the tragedy of Pearl Harbor?
Would we have poke if not for pineapple?
Would there be Kalihi without plantations?
Would there be spam without poi?
Would I be here without this history?
Would anyone?