

Oral Histories of African Americans

**Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

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Center for Oral History
Social Science Research Institute
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa

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RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION STAFF

Kathryn Waddell Takara
Contract researcher/interviewer
Research, interviewing, editing, photographs

Warren S. Nishimoto
Center director
Project administration

Michi Kodama-Nishimoto
Research coordinator
Research, editing, index compilation

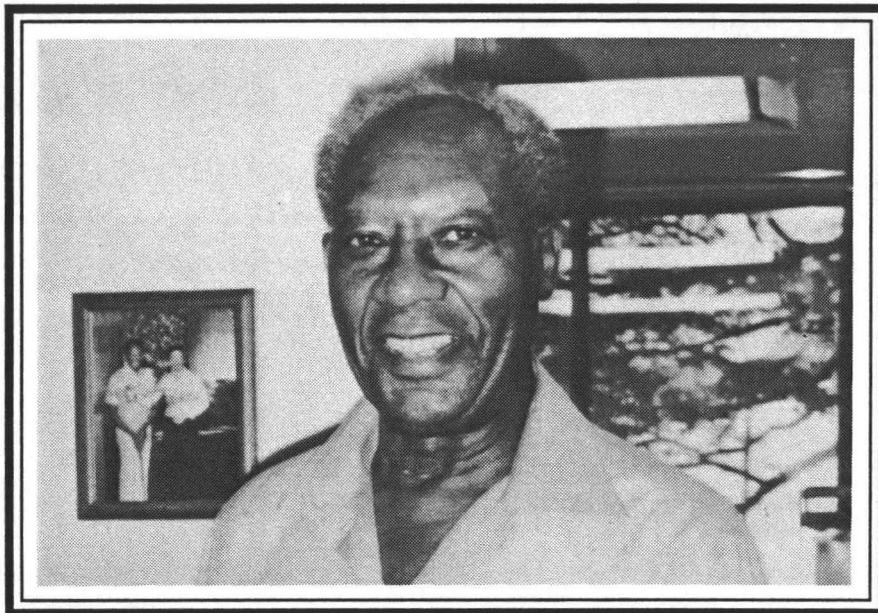
Joe Rossi
Research associate
Research, editing

Cynthia A. Oshiro
Publications specialist
Graphic design and production, editing

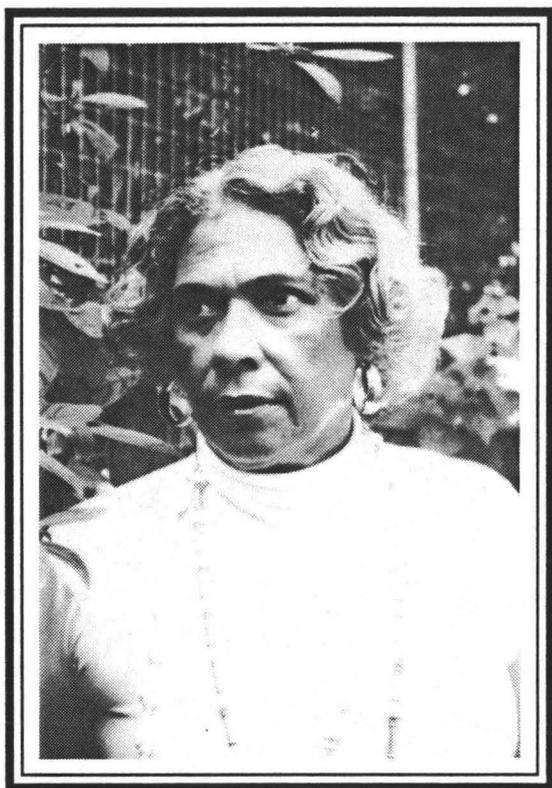
Kathleen Cannallo
Indexer
Index and glossary compilation

Charmaine Akau, Susan Andrews, Cara Lynne Kimura, Glenda Lee, Kathy Okuma
Transcribers
Transcribing

Keith Horikawa, Xiaoming Hou
Student help
Office assistance and binding transcripts



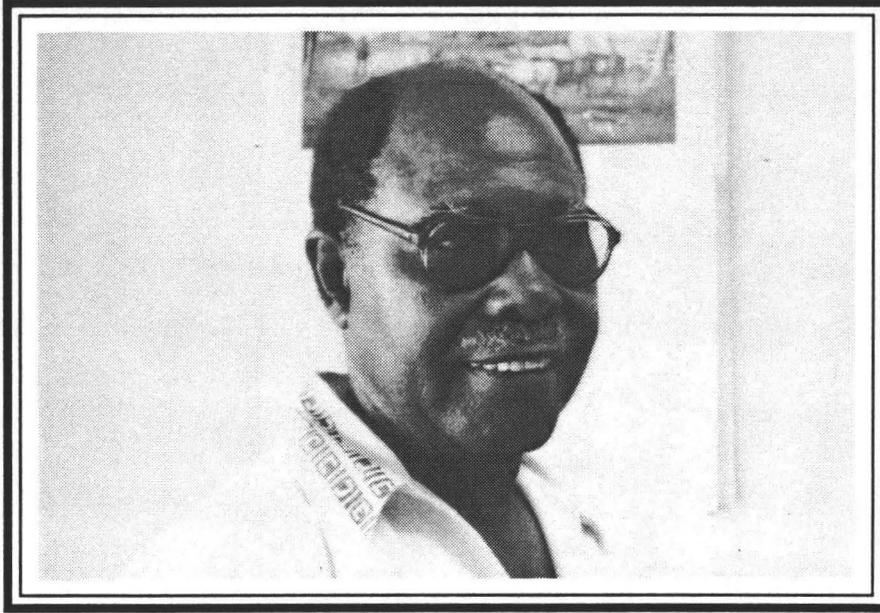
Walter
Alexander



Gladys E. Crampton



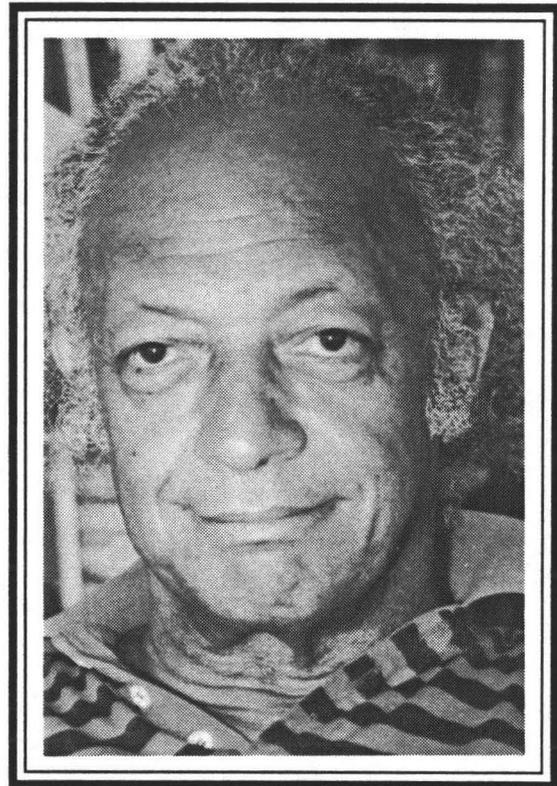
Bertha Dunson



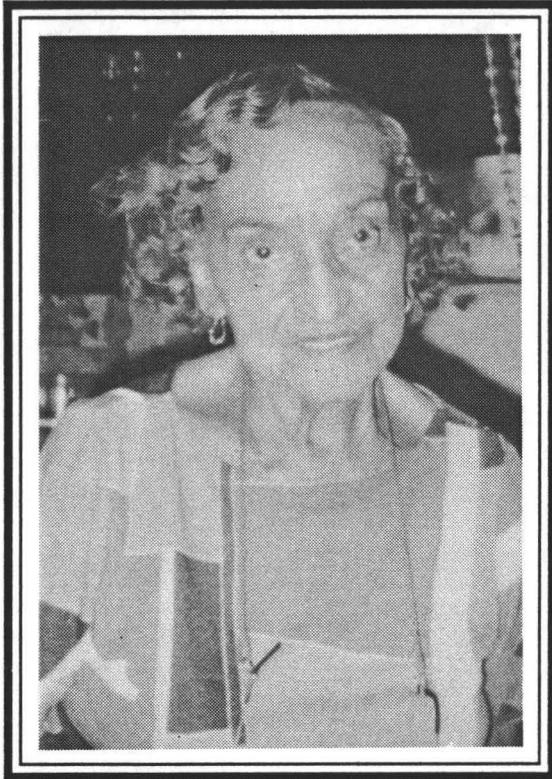
Ernest
Golden



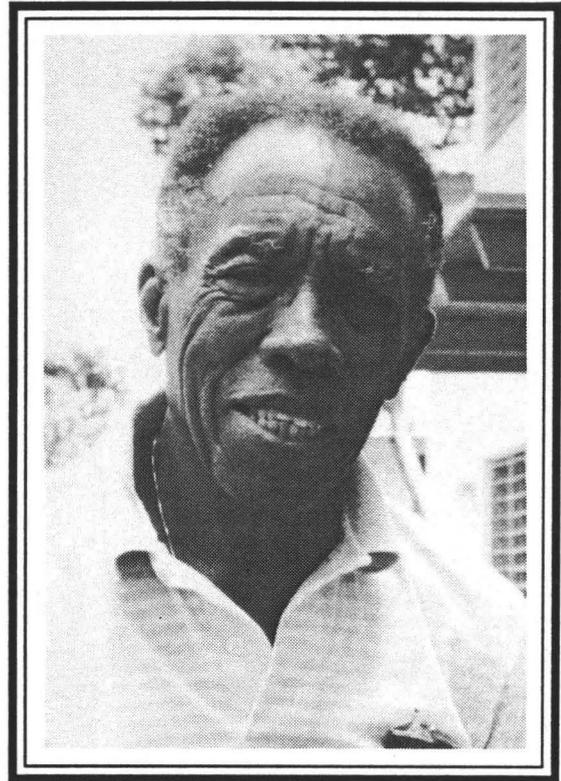
Alexander Lewis



Howard Johnson



Lucille Maloney



Ulyless "Mushy" Robinson



William
Waddell

INTRODUCTION

Although their residence in the Islands spans two centuries and they now number more than 25,000, African Americans in Hawai'i have had very little of their history recorded. This paucity of information prompted the Center for Oral History (COH) in 1988 to contract the services of Kathryn Waddell Takara, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa instructor and researcher in African American history.

Takara, a native of Tuskegee, Alabama and resident of Hawai'i since 1968, teaches an Ethnic Studies course on African Americans in Hawai'i and has written a number of articles on the topic.

Through her associations and friendships, she was able to contact ten older African Americans on O'ahu for audiotaped interviews. She recorded life history interviews with these three women and seven men, ranging in age from fifty-seven to eighty. The interviews were transcribed, audited, edited for accuracy and clarity, reviewed by the interviewees, and edited once again to incorporate the interviewees' corrections, additions, and deletions.

All but one interviewee released their interviews for publication in this volume, *Oral Histories of African Americans*. The published interviewees include: Walter J. Alexander, Gladys E. Crampton, Bertha Elliott Dunson, Ernest LaFaris Golden, Howard Eugene Johnson, Alexander Lewis, Lucille Maloney, Ulyless C. "Mushy" Robinson, and William Henry Waddell, Jr.

The interviewees covered a wide range of topics. Recorded on more than twenty-four hours of tape are reminiscences and discussions of childhoods in such varied communities as Athens (Georgia), Los Angeles, New Orleans, and Philadelphia; family life and parental influences; educational and employment opportunities for African Americans; discrimination and prejudice; segregation practices; "passing" for Caucasian; violence against African Americans; social and cultural life within the African American community; and political activities. Also detailed are World War II experiences; segregated military housing in wartime and postwar Hawai'i; African American-local relations; and adjustment to island life.

Interviewees

Walter J. Alexander

Originally from Green County, Alabama, Walter J. Alexander talks about growing up on a farm, attending the Baptist church, serving in the U.S. Navy, his arrival in the Islands in 1965, ethnic relations in Hawai'i, and the Afro-American Association in Hawai'i.

Gladys E. Crampton

A professional model in the 1950s and art/dance specialist with the department of recreation in Philadelphia, Gladys E. Crampton discusses the role of the church in Philadelphia's African American community, modelling and African Americans, and African American art.

Bertha Elliott Dunson

A retired federal employee, Bertha Elliott Dunson provides valuable information about the African American community in Hawai'i during and after World War II. Included in her interview is a description of segregated military housing and a discussion of ethnic relations in the Islands.

Ernest LaFaris Golden

Longtime owner of a porter business, Ernest LaFaris Golden recalls discrimination in the South, life as a civilian worker in wartime Hawai'i, and the establishment of his porter business at Honolulu International Airport.

Howard Eugene Johnson

A resident of Hawai'i since 1986, Howard Eugene Johnson recalls his checkered career as a Cotton Club performer, Communist Party organizer, and educator.

Alexander Lewis

A retired U.S. Army chaplain, Alexander Lewis discusses growing up in North Carolina, his education, and military career. (Lewis passed away on March 22, 1990.)

Lucille Maloney

Born in Kentucky but raised in Detroit, Lucille Maloney gives her observations on: discriminatory practices in Detroit, the Belle Isle Riots, African American churches, World War II civilian defense work, segregated military housing in Hawai'i, the NAACP in the Islands, and the Wai Wai Nui Club.

Ulyless C. "Mushy" Robinson

Originally an entertainer and dance instructor, Ulyless "Mushy" Robinson was later employed at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard, the Honolulu Rapid Transit Co., and the U.S. Postal Service. He retired in 1980 after working thirty years as a skycap. He talks about his various occupations and making Hawai'i his home.

William Henry Waddell, Jr.

Father of interviewer Kathryn Waddell Takara, William Henry Waddell, Jr., shares family history, incidents from his youth, reminiscences of college life, and highlights of his long career as a veterinarian. He also provides observations on the notable people in his life.

How to Use the Transcripts

This volume contains a glossary of all non-English and Hawai'i Creole English (HCE) words (which are underlined in the transcripts) and a detailed subject/name index. A biographical summary precedes each interviewee's transcript. This volume also contains photographs of the interviewees, and a historical sketch of African Americans in Hawai'i. All interviewees were encouraged to read their transcripts and make any deletions or additions they considered necessary before signing the following legal release:

In order to preserve and make available the history of Hawai'i for present and future generations, I hereby give and grant the University of Hawai'i Center for Oral History as a donation for such scholarly and educational purposes as the Center Director shall determine, all my rights, title, and interest to the tapes and edited transcripts of interviews recorded on (date), biographical data sheet completed (date), and notes of untaped interviews (date).

The transcripts represent statements that interviewees wish to leave for the public record. The majority are almost verbatim from the actual taped interviews. Some interviewees made grammatical or syntactic changes in their transcripts. Others attached additions or explanations. Interviewee additions are in parentheses.

Minor editing for clarity was done by COH staff. The flavor and authenticity of interviews were not compromised by this editing. Staff additions are in brackets. A three-dot ellipsis indicates an interruption; a four-dot ellipsis indicates a trail-off by a speaker. Three dashes indicate false starts.

Audiotape and Transcript Availability

While these transcripts represent the primary documents for archival and research purposes, audio cassettes are available for listening at Hamilton Library's Hawaiian and Pacific Collection, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Researchers should use the tapes only as supplements to the transcripts, since interviewee and staff additions and deletions were not made on the tape.

The identification number, assigned to each audio cassette and transcript, indicates project number, cassette number, session number, and year of interview. For example, Tape No. 18-10-1-88 identifies project number 18, cassette number 10, the first recorded interview session, and the year, 1988.

Oral Histories of African Americans and other COH publications are available at the following locations:

Hawai'i

Hawai'i Public Library (Hilo)
Hawai'i Community College Library
University of Hawai'i at Hilo
Library
Kealahou Community Library

Kaua'i

Līhu'e Public Library
Kaua'i Community College Library

Lāna'i

Lāna'i Public and School Library

Maui

Maui Public Library (Wailuku)
Maui Community College Library

Moloka'i

Moloka'i Public Library

O'ahu

Bishop Museum Library
Hawai'i State Library
Kaimukī Public Library
Kāne'ohe Public Library
Pearl City Public Library
Honolulu Community College Library
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Hawai'i State Archives
Hawai'i State Foundation on Culture
and the Arts.
Hawai'i State Department of Land and
Natural Resources

COH's publications include:

Transcript Collections

- Waialua and Hale'īwa: The People Tell Their Story* (1977)
Life Histories of Native Hawaiians (1978)
Remembering Kaka'ako: 1910-1950 (1978)
Waipi'o: Māno Wai (Source of Life) (1978)
The 1924 Filipino Strike on Kaua'i (1979)
Women Workers in Hawai'i's Pineapple Industry (1979)
Stores and Storekeepers of Pā'ia and Pu'unēne, Maui (1980)
A Social History of Kona (1981)
Five Life Histories (1983)
Kalihi: Place of Transition (1984)
Waikīkī, 1910-1985: Oral Histories (1985)
Ka Po'e Kau Lei: An Oral History of Hawai'i's Lei Sellers (1986)
Perspectives on Hawai'i's Statehood (1986)
Kōloa: An Oral History of a Kaua'i Community (1988)
Lāna'i Ranch: The People of Kō'ele and Keōmuku (1989)

Books

- Uchinanchu: A History of Okinawans in Hawai'i*. Published in cooperation with the United Okinawan Association (1981)
Hanahana: An Oral History Anthology of Hawai'i's Working People (1984)

Finding aids

- Catalog of Oral History Collections in Hawai'i* (1982)
Catalog of the ESOHP Collection, 1976-1984 (1984)
Master Index to the ESOHP Interviews, 1976-1983 (1984)

Other publications

- How To Do Oral History* (Second Edition, Revised 1989)
Oral History Recorder newsletter (1984-.)

The staff of the Center for Oral History, Social Science Research Institute, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, believes that researching, recording, and disseminating the experiences of Hawai'i's people will stimulate further research and foster a better understanding of our islands' history.

COH is solely responsible for any errors in representing or interpreting the statements of interviewees.

Honolulu, Hawai'i
 December 1990

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN HAWAI'I

by Kathryn Waddell Takara

Recorded history of African Americans in Hawai'i is scarce due to the large amount of assimilation that has taken place. Evidence from missionary writings and logs of ship captains show that a few individual Negroes did settle in the islands in the early nineteenth century from the United States, Puerto Rico and the Cape Verde Islands. However, due to much intermarriage with the native Hawaiians and other groups, their descendants were soon absorbed into that category of "other" or "part-" since many found it to be easier to leave all connections and associations with the dreaded New World slavery behind.

Yet unlike the census policy of the U.S. Mainland which classifies anyone of known African or Negro ancestry as Negro, they were classified in the Hawaiian census as Portuguese before 1900. In fact, before 1940, many part-Negroes were classified as Hawaiians, part-Hawaiians, and Puerto Ricans unless they had obvious Negroid features of "kinky hair, everted lips, or very dark skin." Negroes having Hawaiian blood were almost always classified as part-Hawaiian which could be called a crossing of the color line.

Considering the social stigma associated with the slave trade and the "Black race," it is no surprise that when census takers came some Blacks chose to identify with another race more acceptable to the community to avoid the latent and sometimes obvious antagonistic feelings indirectly introduced against Blacks as a group. Moreover, in the 1900 census, people in Hawai'i were classed as White or Coloreds, the latter including persons of Japanese, Chinese, Indian and Negro descent. Later, some Blacks who called themselves part-Negro in the 1910 census, became part-Hawaiian in 1920. It is no secret that specific members of the almost extinct royal family were rumored to have Negro ancestry.

The earliest settlers of African ancestry arrived in Hawai'i well before the missionaries' 1820 arrival. One man called Black Jack, or Mr. Keaka'ele'ele, was already living on O'ahu when Kamehameha conquered the island in 1796. It is said he helped to build a storehouse for Queen Ka'ahumanu in Lahaina, and probably made his living in the maritime industry. (Marc Scruggs, "Early Black Businessmen in Hawai'i," Afro-Hawai'i News.)

Another individual, known as Black Jo, was a longtime resident, trader, and sail master for King Kamehameha II, working with his trading vessels and acting as the king's advisor and interpreter. He died in 1828. (Marc Scruggs, "Early Black Businessmen in Hawai'i," Afro-Hawai'i News.)

In 1811, there came to the island of O'ahu an ex-slave, Anthony D. Allen, from New York. In 1813, he took a Hawaiian wife, had three children and was granted a tract of land. (Marc Scruggs, "Early Black Businessmen in Hawai'i," Afro-Hawai'i News.) He prospered, was much respected in the community and was known as "an entrepreneur extraordinaire." He established a boardinghouse, a bowling alley, a "dram shop" (saloon), and the first hospital for American seamen in Pawa'a. He was also a dairyman, farmer, and blacksmith. His popular boardinghouse was widely known for its excellent cuisine and entertainment. Allen is given credit for building one of the first schools in the islands and the first carriage road to Mānoa Valley. He was so highly respected by the Hawaiian royalty that they gave him land to hold and pass on to his descendants. Allen's son was a paniolo (cowboy). Allen died in 1835. (Marc Scruggs, "A Black Friend of Hawai'i Missionaries," Honolulu Star-Bulletin, Jan. 12, 1987, p. A-10.)

Other Black men were also active in early Hawai'i business matters. "William the Baker" was the king's cook and sold his place in 1833. Joseph Bedford, known as Joe Dollar, had a boardinghouse from 1826 for almost twenty years. Spencer Rhodes operated a barbershop in 1838, Frederick E. Binns had his barbershop by 1845 and Charles Nicholson, a tailor, was sewing in the 1840s until 1861. William Johnson also had a barbershop in 1863. (R.A. Greer, "Blacks in Old Hawai'i," Honolulu, November 1986.)

Blacks starred in the musical world of early Honolulu. Four Blacks formed a royal brass band for Kamehameha III in 1834, and he hired America Shattuck as first master and David Curtis as second master. Another Black, George W. Hyatt, organized a larger band in 1845 with Charles Johnson as band leader. Nine other men participated. (R.A. Greer, "Blacks in Old Hawai'i," Honolulu, November 1986.)

Also noteworthy was Betsy Stockton, an intelligent and dignified ex-slave of the president of Princeton University. She had studied extensively using the comprehensive library of her ex-master and attending evening classes at Princeton Theological Seminary. She accompanied the Charles Stewart family who were with the second group of missionaries to arrive in Hawai'i aboard the ship Thames in 1823 from New Haven, Connecticut. She learned the Hawaiian language and was one of the founders of what came to be Lahaina Luna School on Maui, probably the first school for commoners or maka'ainana, where she spent two years as a teacher for English, Latin, history and algebra (1823-1825), before her untimely return to the East Coast due to the illness of Mrs. Stewart. She is also remembered for her high moral and religious character and for helping to heal the sick while on Maui. (Pacific Commercial Advertiser, May 12, 1906 and HMCS, Missionary Album (1863) p. 922.)

Between 1820-1880, there arrived on whaling ships descendants of Black Portuguese men from the Cape Verde Islands off the coast of West Africa. Some stayed and became residents and worked as musicians, tailors, cooks, barbers and sailors. (Romanzo Adams, "Census Notes on the Negroes in Hawai'i Prior to the War," Social Process, 9-10 (1945):214.)

Because of the great slavery debate in the United States, Blacks were intentionally excluded from the proposed lists of immigrant groups sought in the 1850s to provide contract labor in the Kingdom of Hawai'i by local missionaries and abolitionists opposed to contract labor. (Eleanor C. Nordyke, "Blacks in Hawai'i: A Demographic and Historical Perspective," Hawaiian Journal of History, 22 (1988): 244.) At one point, U.S. Secretary of State Blaine urged the importation of Blacks and not Asians to help replenish the dwindling Hawaiian population, only to meet resistance and aversion to Negro immigrants. Hence there were no significant numbers of Black immigrants until after Hawai'i became a territory in 1900.

In the late nineteenth century, Booker T. Washington, the famous educator from Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, came to Hawai'i to investigate the possibilities of African American plantation workers being used here to supplement the growing Japanese, Chinese, Filipino and Portuguese workers. To his surprise and discovery, he found working conditions here in many ways worse than in the South.

However, by 1901, the first group of about two hundred African American laborers was brought here by the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association from Louisiana and Alabama to join the other Oriental plantation workers on the islands of Maui and Hawai'i. Many later returned South or were amalgamated into the local community. (Thomas G. Thrum, Hawaiian Almanac and Annual for 1902, p. 164.)

The Puerto Ricans who came to Hawai'i about 1901 were in the main also of Negro, Indian, and Spanish descent although in the census they were listed as Caucasian until 1940, probably due to the Spanish part of their heritage.

In 1907, another small group of twenty-five to thirty families came to Maui recruited from Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama, including Mr. Maple, a chemist. The Maple School on Maui is named for the family.

Just before and after annexation in 1898, several African Americans participated in politics and government and made the islands their home. Among them were T. McCants Stewart, an attorney, who helped in drafting the Organic Act of the territory, and on several occasions aided Hawaiians in regaining their lost kuleanas. His daughter, Carlotta Stewart Lai, arrived with him in 1898 and graduated from what is now Punahou School in 1902, and later became a principal at Kaua'i's Hanamā'ulu School; William F. Crockett, another attorney, who came to Hawai'i in 1901, later became district magistrate of Wailuku, Maui, judge, and territorial senator; Crockett's wife and mother were outstanding teachers and his son became deputy county attorney of Maui; James Oliver Mitchell, born in Kōloa, Kaua'i in 1893, was a teacher for forty-six years on O'ahu, and Maui, principal, coach and finally athletic director at Farrington High School; and Nolle R. Smith, a resident of Honolulu, was an engineer here, a fiscal expert in Haiti, Ecuador and Puerto Rico and a member of the territorial house of representatives. The family also acquired a considerable amount of land. Another early African American pioneer was Eva B. Jones Smith also known as Eva Cunningham. She was the first woman to have a radio show in Hawai'i and her piano school was "the place to go" before 1920.

Although individual African Americans were accepted into the community, mass immigration was discouraged by legal restraint as early as 1882 when sugar planters wanted to import large numbers of African Americans to relieve the labor shortage. Moreover, again in 1913, there were strenuous efforts to keep the 25th Negro Infantry Regiment from being stationed here; yet they came and remained for several years without creating friction and made quite a favorable impression. Unfortunately, there were some prominent African American residents who never wanted to be affiliated with the darker races, denied their heritage, and silently blended into the local community.

In 1915, Alice Ball, an African American chemist at the University of Hawai'i, did major research towards the cure of Hansen's disease.

Once more, in 1941, at the outbreak of World War II, there was another mass movement including the city and county government of Honolulu, the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce, the central council of Hawaiian organizations, and several unions, to discourage the U.S. War Department from sending a labor battalion of 600 African Americans to unload ships. Yet, with the coming of World War II, several thousand African American men and some women came as soldiers and defense workers to help the war effort. During this period, there was much friction between Caucasian and African American soldiers manifested in fights, racial slurs and near riots.

The army, navy, and marine corps generally maintained segregated living quarters. Only at Schofield Barracks could men live, work and play together without friction.

Unfortunately, as the military established itself in the 1940s and more tourists began to arrive, the local populace learned indirectly, often through rumor and hearsay, more about African Americans and their inferior status on the Mainland. The consequence was the subtle adaptation of attitudes and stereotypes from the dominant economic and socially acceptable Whites.

Moreover, the media perpetuated the latent anti-Black sentiment of the

Mainland press by reprinting stories which presented the African American in negative stereotypes and identified him/her by race whenever a crime was committed. Likewise, news and reports from the Mainland of lynching and riots were sensational in contrast with the relative harmony here.

Fortunately, these often latent anti-Black feelings brought by the multitude of Mainland Caucasians has not developed into the crystallized prejudice often found on the Mainland, but has nevertheless manifested with some local people in the form of aversion in varying degrees.

During the 1940s and 1950s for example, for some Japanese, "on the spot" after the attack on Pearl Harbor, it was deemed "indiscreet" to be friendly with African Americans and it was known that the FBI opposed an affinity between them and the suspected recalcitrant African American group.

Other instances of this aversion were: patterns of discrimination in hiring; refusal of service at some restaurants, barbershops and taverns; reluctance to rent housing units or sell leasehold/fee property to them; and the denial of cordiality generally given by a local person to a White person. There was also the ostracism of women who dared to date African American men.

After the war, when most African Americans returned to the Mainland, conditions became less strained. Those who remained and those who arrived subsequently most often blended into the local community since there is no defined African American neighborhood or community. Many have become active business persons and government employees. A few have had successful careers in politics and education like Charles Campbell, schoolteacher and former representative from Kalihi; Helene Hale, former "mayor" of the Big Island of Hawai'i; and Dr. Donnis Thompson, educator and former superintendent of the Department of Education. Others have been successful in the fields of entertainment (Trummy Young), the arts (Lilli James), education (Dr. Miles Jackson), and the sciences (Dr. Ernest Harris, entomologist), to mention a few professions. Sadly, however, the obstacle of racism has not disappeared.

Today, the African American as a group has still not been fully accepted in Hawai'i, although there is much lip service given to the practice of racial harmony.

For example, according to a 1982 statistic, there were 330 African American businesses in Hawai'i, but only twenty-three had paid employees, suggesting that the majority were sole proprietorships, and almost half had gross receipts of less than \$5000.

According to the 1990 U.S. census, the approximately 27,700 African Americans residing in Hawai'i comprise 2.5 percent of the total population up from the 17,364 and 1.8 percent figure quoted in the 1980 census. Of the 27,700 total, there are more than one third in the armed forces and almost 50 percent listed as military dependents leaving about 4000 other civilians. However, in the school system, although the number of students has been increasing from 2,239 in 1980-81 to 4,527 in 1986-87, there is a significant decline in number as students move from the lower to higher grades (only 101 high school seniors in 1983-84 and 140 in 1989-90). According to the enrollment statistics compiled in 1990, there were only 468 Blacks in the University of Hawai'i system statewide, making up only 1 percent of the total enrollment, and the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa had a total of 148 Black students, many of whom are male athletes and not residents of the state.

Employment data shows that African Americans in 1988 had a shocking 8.8 percent unemployment rate, the highest of any category. Females had an unemployment rate of 11.4 percent again higher than any other ethnic group, despite the recent trend in well-educated and/or trained African Americans.

Despite ranking second highest in number of years of education according to the 1990 U.S. census, African Americans had the second lowest median income for families and for females in 1989 and fell below the median levels for Hawai'i as a whole.

Despite the long African American presence in the islands, the problems of ignorance and racism must continue to be addressed. The continued decline in population of young African Americans suggests that Hawai'i still does not offer the cultural support for a positive and informed environment connected with the traditional notion of "community" with which African Americans are familiar. The African American historical presence and valuable contributions to our global society must be incorporated into the educational curriculum. And, efforts must be made to incorporate more qualified African Americans (of which there are many!) into authority positions in order to provide more positive role models for the multi-cultural community and to help dispel the mythology of racial inferiority that persists today.

Hawai'i does offer a model of racial harmony to the world, but until it includes African Americans and others of African descent in a more equitable way, it is but a fragile myth.