As a political scientist, I find Coffman’s book a welcome addition to arresting revisionist history.

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Notes


In *Staking Claim: Settler Colonialism and Racialization in Hawai‘i*, Judy Rohrer contends that in order to understand settler colonialism, it is necessary to account for the ways in which racial discourses have been deployed to undermine Native Hawaiian claims, rights, and entitlements. The metaphor “staking claim” is used both literally and metaphorically, referring to the ways nonnatives have established their rights to material resources and the privilege of claiming Hawai‘i as home. Racial discourses—the discourse of racial harmony and the discourse of racial conflict—have supported nonnatives in their claims. She uses the cases of *Harold F. Rice v. Benjamin J. Cayetano* 528 U.S. 495 (2000) (*Rice v. Cayetano*) and challenges to the Kamehameha Schools admissions policy to demonstrate this assertion.
Chapters one and two discuss contemporary scholarship from Native Pacific cultural studies and settler colonial studies. Here Rohrer argues that each field provides strategies that are necessary but not sufficient to an analysis of settler colonialism in Hawai‘i. Patrick Wolfe’s five elements of settler colonialism (colonialism as a structure; the centrality of land; the logic of native elimination; the use of imported labor; and the replacement of natives with nonnatives) can be used to analyze Hawai‘i. What this approach lacks, however, is found in Native Pacific cultural studies, most importantly Native Pacific epistemologies and temporalities that can generate methodologies more appropriate to Hawai‘i.

Chapter three acts as a bridge that links academic theory to the concrete reality of settler colonialism. Here Rohrer argues that racial discourses that “indigenize nonnatives” and “racialize natives” are a key feature of settler colonialism in Hawai‘i. (p. 79) The discourse of racial harmony, which has a long and all too familiar history, presents Hawai‘i as a racial paradise secured by allegiance to Hawaiian values of love, kindness, and a welcoming spirit. The discourse of racial conflict imagines whites as the victims of racism perpetrated by Hawaiians. This discourse was on display during the “Massie Affair” when Native Hawaiians were depicted as a threat to the white community, especially white women. Rohrer argues that these discourses “naturalize” the presence of nonnatives, erasing the violence of colonialism by treating Whites as just one of the many groups (including Hawaiians) who settled Hawai‘i.

Chapters four and five analyze the Supreme Court decision in Rice v. Cayetano and the public discussion of the challenges to the Kamehameha Schools admissions policy. Harold Rice, a fifth generation descendant of American missionaries, sued for the right to vote in elections for the Trustees of the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA), a state entity established to distribute resources owed to Native Hawaiians as a result of the theft of land by the U.S. government after annexation. OHA elections had been restricted to Hawaiians (defined by blood quantum or ancestry). Rice argued that the elections violated the 14th and 15th Amendments. Rohrer demonstrates that the courts sided with Rice because Hawaiians were racialized, i.e. treated as a race, not as indigenous people who had a prior claim to Hawai‘i that predated and superseded the U.S. Constitution. A similar process happened in the Kamehameha Schools cases in which nonnatives challenged the admissions policies that gave preference to children of Hawaiian descent. Both cases were backed by conservative political groups and lawyers who used a “color-blind” racial ideology that imagined whites to be victims of systemic discrimination that excluded them from preferences reserved for Native Hawaiians. Rohrer suggests that by claiming their right to attend Kamehameha Schools, these nonnatives were attempting to “indigenize” themselves by equating them
selves with Kanaka Maoli who were meant to be the principal beneficiaries of Bernice Pauahi Bishop’s estate.

For Rohrer, the cases reveal a significant problem because they rely on a dichotomy between who belongs (natives) and who does not (settler), a strict binary that does not reflect the more complicated reality of Hawai’i’s past and present. She offers a potential resolution, a “third space of sovereignty” that moves beyond this binary. (p. 161) It emerges from Native Pacific epistemologies in which identity is not determined by structures and processes that are part of the apparatus of the colonial state. Identity and the right to stake a claim to Hawai’i is established through a genealogy that connects an individual to the land and ancestors. Staking a claim through genealogy requires recognizing and carrying out one’s kuleana (responsibilities). Decolonization, then, is a political project that is driven by a deeper more nuanced understanding of identity, relationship, and responsibility. Rohrer explores these issues in the book’s final chapter. She uses feminist theories, Chicana studies and her own experiences to investigate her genealogy—her family’s lineage and how it came to intersect with Hawai’i—and her own kuleana in the struggle for decolonization.

This is a complicated book with many moving parts. Not all of them fit together neatly, which may be a reflection of the complexity of the ideas or an indication of a flawed approach to the subject. Those involved in the study of settler colonialism and Native Pacific cultural studies will find a great deal to grapple with. Rohrer’s arguments are compelling, though an audience unfamiliar with the academic work she builds on might find sections of the book difficult to follow. Nevertheless, the book is worth the struggle in that it offers a fresh approach to understanding the vexing problem of decolonization and a provocative way forward.

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Reporter-columnist Tsai delivers an intriguing history of the Honolulu Marathon, which has long been among the most significant and popular in the