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## The Honolulu NAACP and Race Relations in Hawai'i

HAWAI'I DREW almost no attention among African American leaders or protest organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) or the National Urban League prior to World War II. However, the onset of global conflict changed the racial landscape of Hawai'i in profound ways. For the first time, tens of thousands of African American servicemen and war workers passed through Hawai'i, admittedly a fraction of the nearly one million American soldiers, sailors, and marines who traversed this Pacific paradise or were stationed on one of Hawai'i's military bases. Yet the 30,000 African Americans who came to Hawai'i during World War II, wrote David Farber and Beth Bailey, "found themselves in a racial hothouse."<sup>1</sup>

Although World War II marked the first large in-migration of African Americans to Hawai'i, blacks had settled in the islands for more than a century prior to 1941. Anthony Allen, a fugitive slave from Schenectady, New York, arrived in Hawai'i in 1810. Allen was attempting to escape the oppressive conditions of that both slaves and free blacks faced in northern states such as New York. In Hawai'i, Allen

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*The Hawaiian Journal of History*, vol. 39 (2005)

succeeded beyond his wildest expectations, becoming a respected merchant, marrying a Hawaiian woman, and serving as one of the advisers of Kamehameha the Great. Yet Allen was not alone. Betsey Stockton, the first African American female reported in Hawai'i, had arrived in 1823 to work with Christian missionaries. Yet neither Allen's nor Stockton's presence in Hawai'i stimulated a sizable movement of African Americans to Hawai'i in the nineteenth century, save several dozen Black missionaries, laborers, and seamen. In 1898, however, T. McCants Stewart, a prominent African American leader from Brooklyn, New York, arrived in Hawai'i with his family. Stewart had hoped to take advantage of the economic and political opportunities in Hawai'i during the formative stages of American settlement. But Stewart, like Anthony Allen, was also attempting to escape racial discrimination in the United States. Although Stewart remained in Hawai'i for only seven years, his daughter, Carlotta, graduated from Oahu College (Punahou School) and became a respected teacher and principal on the islands of O'ahu and Kaua'i.<sup>2</sup>

By 1900, only 233 African Americans lived in Hawai'i, and they represented but 0.2 percent of the total population. A modest attempt to import African American laborers had been made in the early 1900s by the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association. In 1901, the association successfully recruited at least 200 African Americans from Tennessee, and six years later about 30 Black families were recruited from several southern states. Yet the number of Black workers imported to Hawai'i remained relatively modest and, for a variety of reasons, including its distance from the mainland and the absence of established African American communities, the islands had not served as a magnet for Black migrants.<sup>3</sup>

The relatively tolerant and tranquil racial atmosphere that African Americans such as T. McCants Stewart and his daughter Carlotta had encountered in Hawai'i during the early decades of the twentieth century changed dramatically with the importation of American service personnel. White servicemen and their commanding officers attempted to recreate the segregated policies and practices that had existed on the mainland for nearly a century, and, to a large extent, they succeeded. White servicemen, for instance, spread vicious rumors about black people in general and black soldiers in particular, portraying them as thieves, rapists, murderers, criminals, and carrying a

multitude of diseases. Black men could not be trusted under any circumstance, and were a particular menace to the islands' female population.<sup>4</sup>

These vicious racial attitudes, as well as the widespread pattern of segregation directed against African American servicemen in hotels, dance halls, and public accommodations, served as pivotal factors in the earliest attempt to establish an NAACP branch in Hawai'i. As early as February 1941, a small group of multiracial residents inquired about the prospect of organizing a NAACP branch in Honolulu. The request clearly took the NAACP's national leadership by surprise, for no branch had ever been chartered outside of the continental United States and Hawai'i contained a small black community in 1940. Approximately 255 African Americans resided in the islands in 1940, a number that could be found on any given night occupying a pool hall on Chicago's South Side or a barbershop in Philadelphia or New York. Yet these Hawai'i residents persisted. "Never before in the history of your people was there a greater need to organize than today. With the ever growing prejudice, and especially among the service men here, I feel that a group with your backing could protect their rights," wrote Jacob Prager to William Dean Pickens, director of NAACP branches in New York.<sup>5</sup> In subsequent correspondence, Prager, a native of Boston of Jewish faith residing in Hawai'i, informed Pickens that discrimination in defense industry jobs was just as prevalent in Hawai'i as in west coast cities. "I have noticed that on the defense projects, Negroes [sic] still get the small pick and shovel jobs, not because they cannot fill other jobs, but, because of prejudice," wrote Prager.<sup>6</sup>

William Dean Pickens remained unconvinced that Hawai'i's racial problems were as serious as other locales on the United States mainland. He lamented that Hawai'i, to his recollection, had been free of racial prejudice when he had visited the islands previously, a misconception shared by numerous observers of all races who came to Hawai'i. The Hawaiian Islands, Pickens opined nostalgically, was "undoubtedly the freest place and freer from color prejudice of any part of the US territory. But even in such a condition, we would need organized cooperation to prevent the development of discrimination."<sup>7</sup> Thus Pickens concurred, albeit reluctantly, that in spite of Hawai'i's relatively benign racial past, organizing a branch of the

NAACP as sort of a preemptive strike made perfect sense. Although Roy Wilkins, then assistant director of the national NAACP, displayed far less enthusiasm than Pickens regarding this idea, and he queried the NAACP field secretary about the background of H. Parke Williams, an African American resident in Hawai'i and the principal booster of the Honolulu branch, he and other national NAACP leaders encouraged Hawai'i's leadership to continue their organizing efforts. H. Parke Williams gave the national NAACP office even more reason to praise their zeal when he requested that Pickens send "at least 150 [membership] application blanks, grant him permission to solicit funds in behalf of the NAACP, and mail at least twenty-five copies of the *Crisis* magazine so that some may be sold at meetings." Pickens assumed, in kind, that Williams would keep him informed about both the group's organizing efforts and the racial climate in Hawai'i. "At any early date I shall forward a more comprehensive picture of inter-racial conditions on those islands," wrote Williams.<sup>8</sup>

These early organizing efforts by a committed group of interracial leaders in Honolulu fizzled almost abruptly as they began after H. Parke Williams suddenly left the islands in the spring of 1941. Roy Wilkins had been correct to inquire about Williams's reputation, for he proved less interested in racial betterment than in filling his own coffers. Williams pocketed membership funds from 53 people and failed to mail them to the national office. Despite repeated attempts by the NAACP national office to contact him, Williams has not been heard from since.<sup>9</sup>

Although discouraged, local activists in Honolulu continued to press the NAACP national office to organize a local branch, as racial attitudes grew even more vicious and discrimination more pernicious against African American servicemen. By early 1944, these local leaders, led by Kenneth Sano and William C. Page, both Hawai'i residents, took the initiative and passed a resolution, "requesting charter and establishing of local branch in Hawai'i from the NAACP."<sup>10</sup> Yet mindful that H. Parke Williams had absconded with the initial funds that were raised for memberships, these new activists, a bit wiser three years removed, designated Henry J. Green, deputy of the Territory of Hawai'i for the Elks, an established African American fraternal society, to serve as the group's liaison to the NAACP's national office.

Under the authority of the organizing committee, Green mailed an application to NAACP headquarters with 102 memberships to Ella J. Baker, who now served as director of branches.<sup>11</sup>

Yet rather than welcoming the Honolulu branch with open arms, the NAACP's national leadership was cautious and reserved. Walter White, the executive director, and the NAACP board of directors, were uncertain if their charter permitted it to establish branches outside of the mainland United States. Ella Baker had no such reservations, and, like William Pickens before her, encouraged Kenneth Sano and others in Honolulu to press on. The NAACP board of directors, however, did not share Baker's enthusiasm, and voted instead to postpone the request for an official NAACP charter until Walter White visited Hawai'i in December 1944, when the NAACP's executive director had proposed to tour the Pacific war zone. Ella Baker, clearly disappointed with the board's decision, fired off a memorandum to Walter White, requesting that the board of directors reconsider its decision. The decision stood. In the meantime, 102 people from Hawai'i were granted NAACP membership, but not the authority to organize a formal branch, a situation that the national office did not find the least bit awkward.<sup>12</sup>

This decision, however, was reversed following Walter White's whirlwind visit to Hawai'i in December 1944. Before a large public gathering, which numbered more than 250 people, White discussed the proposed chartering of a branch of the NAACP in Honolulu. The majority of those in attendance were African American servicemen, who had a particular stake in both the war's outcome and the creation of a local NAACP branch in Honolulu, which they viewed as one vehicle to protect their rights. That these servicemen possessed a strong racial consciousness, there can be no doubt, for Walter White attempted to answer questions on such important topics as the Port Chicago mutiny trial of African American sailors, black postwar unemployment, and "possibilities of racial wars following World War II."<sup>13</sup> That black servicemen would query White about the prospects for racial wars in the United States at the conclusion of this global conflict, reveals a keen awareness of the race riots and wave of racial violence that swept across America following World War I in dozens of American cities. Unlike their World War I counterparts, who had

expected a new racial order upon their return to the United States after fighting for democracy abroad, these African American servicemen were far less naive.<sup>14</sup>

From the onset, the drive to charter an NAACP branch in Honolulu was interracial, and Walter White, as well as Ella Baker, were pleased with this fact. Kenneth Sano, for instance, a pivotal figure in the drive to charter a local branch, was of Asian ancestry. Sano had served as a local distributor of *Crisis* magazine, an indication that he was keenly aware of the NAACP's goals and objectives and how a local branch of the NAACP could potentially assist the local populace in minimizing racial conflict. It was an example, too, of the NAACP's reach that the *Crisis* magazine had made its way across the Pacific to Hawai'i. Yet Sano was only one of many non-African Americans who supported the establishment of a local branch. Irving Townsend, a white ensign in the United States Navy Pacific Fleet, wrote the NAACP national office and pledged his unqualified support. "I would like to enlist myself in your case and give it all the support of which I am capable, if my services can help you at all in the future. I have great faith in the future of the Colored Race and hope to have some part in helping them get their future recognition as soon as possible," wrote Townsend.<sup>15</sup>

This groundswell of multiracial support, White's concern for the welfare of black servicemen, and Kenneth Sano's boast that as many as 500 people in Honolulu were interested in joining the NAACP, convinced Walter White that a local branch was necessary and worth whatever risk that creating a branch this far removed from the United States mainland might entail. After consulting with his board of directors and receiving their assurance that the NAACP could legally charter a branch outside of the continental U.S., White recommended that the national office issue a charter to establish a branch of the NAACP in Honolulu.<sup>16</sup> As Ella Baker informed Henry Green, "you perhaps note there was some difference of opinion as to the feasibility of establishing a branch so far from our national headquarters," a reservation that persisted at the NAACP national office for many years. These reservations notwithstanding, the Honolulu branch received its official charter in June, 1945, and Kenneth Sano promised Ella Baker that "we intend to make our branch an example of efficiency and intelligence, for we feel that only in that way can a

worthwhile cause be given proper emphasis." The Honolulu branch had the distinction of being the first NAACP branch chartered outside of the mainland United States and the first branch established in United States territory rather than in a state.<sup>17</sup> Given its diverse membership, which included African Americans, whites, Japanese, Chinese, and members of Hawaiian ancestry, the Honolulu NAACP may well have been the most racially and ethnically diverse of any NAACP branch.

Despite its prestige, the Honolulu branch was just one of several organizations working to achieve racial justice in Hawai'i. For many years, the Inter-Racial Committee had worked to promote equality and fair play, and with the onset of World War II, the Hawaii Association for Civic Unity was established.<sup>18</sup> Councils for Civic Unity existed in numerous American cities during World War II in an effort to improve the racial climate after the large wartime migration of African Americans. In some cities, where few blacks had lived prior to 1940, such as San Francisco, Seattle, and Los Angeles, civic and community leaders viewed these organizations as vehicles to lessen racial friction and, in some instances, to prevent race riots. Thus these interracial organizations, which comprised the major civic, business, and community leaders, played important roles in many western cities. They often worked in tandem with more established civil rights organizations such as the NAACP and the National Urban League.

The Honolulu NAACP wasted little time in presenting a slate of officers, and elected Fleming R. Waller, who resided on South King Street, as its first president, and Kenneth Sano, whom Katharine Lackey called the "moving spirit of this organization in the Islands" as secretary-treasurer.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Sano, one of the many unsung figures in the national records of the NAACP, played a pivotal role in the branch's founding and during its formative years. Sano, for example, consistently pressed Ella Baker on the urgent need for a branch in Hawai'i, despite the territory's small African American population and its distance from the mainland. Sano also took the initiative to prepare a meticulous outline of the branch's "proposed plan of action," and he contacted all interested persons and organizations in Honolulu, including local newspapers, announcing the creation of a new NAACP branch in Hawai'i. Finally, Sano, as well as other local leaders, organized a small dinner for those individuals, he

believed, would, “take an active part in the Branch.”<sup>20</sup> Nor did Sano, a careful organizer and a meticulous leader, act in haste. He cautioned Ella Baker that the newly formed branch would purposely delay taking part in the national drive for new members until the branch had explained the purpose of the NAACP to local residents and promoted sufficient interest in the Honolulu community. “We want a carefully considered plan with influential citizens behind us and our proposals presented to the public before any membership drive is undertaken,” he informed Ella Baker.<sup>21</sup>

During its formative years, the Honolulu branch, like all new NAACP chapters, struggled to gain members and attempted to forge an identity. Since this type of civil rights organization had never existed in Hawai‘i, local residents did not know exactly what to expect. Yet the local branch set the tone early when it vigorously protested racially offensive advertisements that appeared in the *Honolulu Advertiser* and the *Honolulu Star Bulletin* for the sale of “20-inch Nigger Dolls.” Although this type of grotesque caricature of African Americans had been sold for over a century, and was particularly prevalent in the southern states, they were relatively new to Hawai‘i, perhaps a product of the large in-migration of white servicemen from the South. Katharine Lackey, who succeeded Fleming Waller as branch president, seized the initiative and joined with the Inter-Racial Committee to protest this indignity. Lackey organized an intensive letter-writing campaign directed to the editors of both daily newspapers in Honolulu, and the racially offensive advertisement was removed immediately. “I am sure that this advertisement does not indicate the policy of the management of either the *Star-Bulletin* or the *Advertiser*,” Lackey informed Madison Jones, Jr., an administrative assistant at the NAACP’s national office. In reality, both newspapers had occasionally run racially offensive headlines and editorials, maligning both African Americans and Asians, although this practice had become less frequent by World War II.<sup>22</sup>

The Honolulu branch also pushed for a systematic investigation of racial discrimination in the islands, particularly in the areas of housing and employment. While discrimination had been uncommon in these areas prior to World War II, it was practiced more frequently as the African American population increased between 1941 and 1945. Thus it came as no surprise when Lackey informed Ella Baker

that the Honolulu branch would conduct a comprehensive survey to reveal the types of racial discrimination most commonly practiced in Hawaii.<sup>23</sup> The branch also passed a resolution in 1946 endorsing statehood for Hawaii, 13 years before the territory officially joined the union. The Honolulu branch's executive committee unanimously approved of Hawaii becoming a state and the branch president appointed a statehood committee to meet with the governor and the local press. Fleming Waller also mailed a copy of the branch's resolution supporting Hawaii statehood to African American Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., in the hope of gaining an ally in the United States Congress. There is no record, however, that Powell ever replied to this request.<sup>24</sup>

Although statehood was the most sensational issue that the Honolulu branch addressed, the quest for fair employment was a more urgent matter. The majority of African Americans who lived in Hawaii between 1941 and 1950 were members of the armed forces, and were, therefore, unaffected by employment discrimination in the civilian sector that African Americans faced daily. Since Hawaii had no laws prohibiting employment discrimination, the Honolulu branch had little recourse except to investigate allegations and exert moral suasion on an employer.<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Rademaker, president of the Hawaii Association for Civic Unity, encouraged the NAACP's national office in New York to "excite the interest" of the Honolulu branch and join forces with the Civic Unity Council to pressure the legislature to pass a Territorial Fair Employment Practices Act. This was precisely the kind of interracial alliance that the NAACP national office had encouraged the upstart Honolulu branch to seek, for Hawaii's racial makeup, they noted frequently in their correspondence, was different from most states on the mainland. Thus Madison Jones spoke for all national NAACP officers when he directed the Honolulu NAACP to "entertain a philosophy of boldness in their approach to the racial question linking up the cause and program of the other groups."<sup>26</sup>

Multiracial alliances offered another benefit to the Honolulu branch: the opportunity to expand its membership base beyond the islands' small African American population. Many servicemen, irrespective of race, such as Irving Townsend, a white naval officer who supported the formation of the Honolulu branch, terminated their

membership when they were discharged from the military and shipped home. Thus any alliance, however tenuous, permitted the Honolulu NAACP to enlist whites, Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, Filipinos, and Hawaiians on their membership rolls. Given the historically small African American population in Hawai'i, it was critically important for the local branch to reach out and serve the needs of other racial and ethnic groups as well as blacks.<sup>27</sup>

As officers of the Honolulu branch attempted to address the concerns of a diverse membership and allegations of increasing discrimination in the islands in the postwar years, they faced a challenge to their leadership. Branch president Fleming Waller revealed that serious dissent existed within the Honolulu branch, and just five months after his reelection as branch president submitted his resignation to the board of directors. Confident of Waller's capable leadership, the branch's executive board refused to accept it and encouraged their embattled president to persevere. Waller had found it personally frustrating to work with James Neal, the branch's vice-president, who he described as possessing an "incongruous [sic] Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde personality—a personality that renders it impossible for others to work for long with him."<sup>28</sup>

Leadership squabbles, to be sure, in NAACP branches or in any civil rights organization, were commonplace, and the NAACP's long established policy had been to allow its branches to sort out these disagreements among themselves. Occasionally, if a dispute seemed beyond the ability of local leadership to resolve amicably, it was not uncommon for either a regional director or the national director of branches to pay the branch a visit and attempt to mediate the dispute. Yet the Honolulu branch posed several unique challenges to the national office. Hawai'i's sheer distance from the mainland made a trip by a national official, such as Walter White or Gloster Current, very expensive and time consuming. Not surprisingly, yet to the dismay of local leaders, the Honolulu branch did not have an official visit from the NAACP's branch department during its first three years of existence.<sup>29</sup> When branch officials in Hawai'i complained of feeling disconnected from the affairs of other NAACP branches and the national office in New York, Current encouraged the Honolulu branch secretary to send delegates to the annual meetings. Although this was sound advice and within the purview of branch leaders, Cur-

rent's unwillingness to visit Hawai'i only distanced the Honolulu branch further from the national office.<sup>30</sup> Current's remark also illustrated an insensitivity that the national office displayed toward the Honolulu branch and its membership.

By 1949, the Honolulu branch faced a far more serious crisis: allegations that members of the Communist party were current members or seeking membership in the branch.<sup>31</sup> Since the conclusion of World War II, the NAACP had taken a firm stand on members of the Communist party and individuals in other radical organizations applying for membership in their branches: they were not welcomed. This may explain the urgency of Gloster Current's tone when he asked the president and executive board of the Honolulu branch to clarify this matter for the national office. Yet, James Neal, the outgoing branch president, turned Current's question on its head and demanded that the national office, not the local branch, clarify its own policy on membership. "If no national policy exists regarding this problem [we] desire [the] authority [to permit] Honolulu Branch to set their own policy," wrote Neal. Gloster Current informed branch officials that in neither the Branch Constitution nor the National Constitution were individuals required to sign a loyalty oath in order to join the NAACP, to hold office, or to vote in branch elections. To do otherwise, argued Current, constituted discrimination based on one's political views, clearly a violation of NAACP policy.<sup>32</sup>

Yet the director of branches couched his words very carefully in clarifying the NAACP's position on this matter, attempting to walk a fine line between censorship and freedom of association. "There should be no discrimination," stated Current, "in offering membership to any person on account of race, color, creed, religion or political views. However, we do urge branches to be diligent in carrying forward the program of the NAACP and to be alert to check the indoctrination or course of action not consistent with our program." In a word, Current informed the Honolulu branch that any *new* policy would require approval from the NAACP national office as stipulated in the branch constitution.<sup>33</sup>

On the more urgent matter of Communist party members who also held membership in the Honolulu branch, Morris Freedman, a branch officer, was direct and unwavering. At least thirty members of the Honolulu branch, Freedman informed Gloster Current, includ-

ing branch officers and members of the executive committee, were openly affiliated with the Communist party in Hawai'i. These individuals, noted Freedman, had gained such a foothold in the branch that its work had virtually come to a standstill. Freedman urged Current to either suspend the Honolulu branch's charter on a temporary basis or, "send someone here from the National Office so that he can make an investigation of the situation."<sup>34</sup>

The NAACP's national office, showing their indifference to the affairs of the Honolulu branch, once again declined to visit the branch, citing inadequate finances to make a trip of this magnitude. But Current added an important caveat. "I doubt whether the [Honolulu] branch can carry out the program of the NAACP anyway as it has been outlined here," he exclaimed, in his frankest statement regarding the troubled branch. Within a month, Current informed the new branch president, Catherine Christopher that, "if the Honolulu Branch is unable to settle its differences amicably at the next election we shall have no other recourse than to consider possible suspension or revocation of its charter."<sup>35</sup> In the space of four years, the work of the Honolulu branch had become a comedy of errors, crippled by leadership struggles and the infiltration of at least one radical political party. These problems, regrettably, eclipsed more significant issues such as employment and housing discrimination or improving race relations, issues that the Honolulu branch had grappled with successfully between 1945 and 1947. However, contested branch elections and voting irregularities had become commonplace by 1949, as Eleanor Agnew and Robert Greene, two branch officers, informed Gloster Current and Lucille Black at the national office.<sup>36</sup> To an outsider such as Frank Davis, executive editor of the Associated Negro Press, who had come to Hawai'i in 1948 to write a book of poetry and a series of articles about the islands, "a temporary suspension of [the] charter is the most logical step if a [branch] president cannot be elected." Davis also corroborated the opinions of others that Communists and Communist sympathizers had considerable influence within the branch. Yet Davis urged Roy Wilkins and other NAACP officials to approach this matter cautiously, for he believed that the NAACP could potentially, "run into difficulties in the matter of keeping control away from Communist or Communist sympathiz-

ers in these days of growing reaction when even mild liberals are red-baited.”<sup>37</sup>

These suggestions notwithstanding, both Gloster Current and Roy Wilkins had lost faith in the Honolulu branch’s leadership, its ability to hold fair and impartial elections, and with the harm that Communist party affiliation could bring to the NAACP’s image. Thus in June, 1949, the Committee on Branches at the national office voted to recommend to the board of directors that the Honolulu branch’s charter be revoked.<sup>38</sup> This highly unusual move by the national office had been expected by many branch members and welcomed by some. Yet acting branch president Catherine Christopher remained obstreperous despite Roy Wilkins’s warning. Christopher denied in a truculent tone that either she or any officer had failed to follow NAACP policy to the letter. “I strongly resent, however, the implication of intent to prejudice the NAACP in the phrase guilty of conduct inimical to the NAACP,” she protested. Attempting to assume the high ground, as well as to preserve her reputation, Christopher lectured Wilkins: “It ought to be clear to you that my conduct was motivated solely by the desire to protect the NAACP and protect it zealously from the undermining process to which it is being subjected in Honolulu.”<sup>39</sup>

Neither Wilkins nor Current, however, were convinced, and they pressed their recommendation to the NAACP board of directors to revoke the Honolulu branch’s charter. The board of directors agreed with this assessment and voted at their November 1949 meeting to formally revoke the branch’s charter. Roy Wilkins informed a clearly discouraged Catherine Christopher of the board of director’s final decision and requested that she, as acting president, “kindly forward the charter of the Branch, all records, property and monies of this notice.”<sup>40</sup> Those individuals in Hawai‘i who wished to continue their affiliation with the NAACP would be considered as members at large, independent of any local branch affiliation.<sup>41</sup>

So what went wrong? How did a branch of the NAACP that began with such promise, enthusiasm, and a committed local leadership dissolve within four years? And what could Hawai‘i’s local leadership or the NAACP national office have done differently to have prevented this outcome? Part of the answer lies in a letter that Gloster Current wrote to Anita Flynn in 1950, who had requested general informa-

tion on the local NAACP branch in Hawai'i. "I am afraid that there is very little that I can tell you about the situation in Hawai'i," wrote Current. "We did have a Branch in Hawai'i but because of internal friction and the fact that the National Office could not supervise the Branch in any way because of the distance[,] the charter was revoked by the National Board of Directors."<sup>42</sup>

In reality, Current could have revealed a great deal more to Flynn regarding the Honolulu branch's demise and implosion, and his lack of candor is surprising just nine months after the NAACP board of directors had voted to revoke the branch's charter. Current failed to acknowledge, for example, that the NAACP would not tolerate any radical political party to take control of the leadership of its branches, and it found the Communist party the most repugnant of all. He might have also revealed to Flynn that in the entire four years that the branch was in existence, not one official from the national office ever visited Hawai'i, despite the severity of its internal strife and the leadership crisis within the branch. Nor did the branch's lack of members serve as the pivotal reason for the NAACP board of directors in terminating this branch, for the Honolulu NAACP reported a membership of 194 in 1946 and 215 in 1947, a highly respectable membership for any new NAACP branch and a larger NAACP membership than in some western cities on the mainland.<sup>43</sup> And while factionalism and leadership struggles were evident in the Honolulu branch, the same could be said regarding numerous NAACP branches throughout the country, none of which were in danger of having their charters revoked.

What especially hurt this branch's image and standing in the eyes of national NAACP leaders was the association of branch activities with the Communist party, the inability of the branch to attract a strong president after 1947, and the distance between the Honolulu branch and the national office. This final point deserves closer scrutiny, because the NAACP's West Coast Regional Office, based in San Francisco, had Noah Griffin, a capable regional director, as its head. Yet instead of taking an aggressive posture to correct turmoil within the branch, the West Coast Regional Office and the national office permitted the Honolulu branch to self-destruct as it viewed the carnage from afar. Neither Gloster Current, Roy Wilkins, nor Noah

Griffin ever seriously entertained visiting the branch to offer their guidance, at the very time when NAACP officials would have been hard pressed to locate a branch in greater need of their services.

Yet the Honolulu branch deserves most of the blame for its dissolution, for it attracted strong leadership between 1945 and 1947, but only leaders who were obstinate, inflexible, and confrontational between 1948 and 1949. As Hubert H. White wrote in the *Atlanta World*, an African American weekly newspaper, after it appeared imminent that the Honolulu branch would lose its charter, "it seems to this writer that the real trouble with the Honolulu branch has been its lack of trained, intelligent leadership."<sup>44</sup> Neither Catherine Christopher nor James Neal, who served as branch presidents of the Hawai'i NAACP between 1947 and 1949, possessed the leadership qualities that were necessary to quell dissent within the branch or to work effectively with the national office. Consequently, by 1949 the NAACP in Hawai'i was a dead letter, and in April, 1951, Edward Cox, former branch treasurer, mailed a check in the amount of \$238.70 to the NAACP national office, officially terminating the relationship between the defunct branch and the oldest civil rights organization in the nation.<sup>45</sup>

The NAACP, despite its inauspicious start in Hawai'i during the 1940s, ultimately gained a foothold in the islands and became an important civil rights organization. More than a decade would pass before African Americans and their supporters in Hawai'i attempted to organize another NAACP branch in the islands.<sup>46</sup> In 1960, Willie Moore, an African American sergeant in the U.S. Marines, who had transferred to Hawai'i from Camp Pendleton in California, imbued with the same zeal and commitment of Jacob Prager and Kenneth Sano, requested permission from the NAACP to organize a branch in Hawai'i. If Moore had been aware of the obstacles that previous supporters of the Hawai'i branch had faced, he may have had second thoughts. Undeterred, he pressed on, and on May 9, 1960, the NAACP national office granted Hawai'i a branch charter for the second time. By the mid-1960s, the Hawai'i NAACP branch had emerged as a major civil rights organization in the islands, but it also aligned its own struggle with the broader campaign for racial justice led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership

Conference. Working collectively with an array of multiracial organizations in the islands, the Hawai'i NAACP would play a vital role in pushing for civil rights and racial equality for all Hawai'i residents throughout the twentieth century.<sup>47</sup>

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> David Farber and Beth Bailey, *The First Strange Place: The Alchemy of Race and Sex in World War II Hawai'i* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 133.
- <sup>2</sup> Katherine Takara, "Who is the Black Woman in Hawai'i?", in Nancy FoonYoung and Judy R. Parrish, eds., *Montage* (Honolulu, Hawai'i: General Assistance Center for the Pacific, 1977), 86–87; R. A. Greer, "Blacks in Old Hawai'i," *Honolulu* 21 (November 1986): 120–121, 183–184; Marc Scruggs, "Anthony Allen: A Prosperous American of African Descent in Early 19th Century Hawai'i," *HJH* 26 (1992): 55–93; Constance K. Escher, "She Calls Herself Betsey Stockton," *Princeton History* 10 (1991): 71–101; Bobette Gugliotta, *Nolle Smith: Cowboy, Engineer, Statesman* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1971); Albert S. Broussard, "Carlotta Stewart-Lai, A Black Teacher in the Territory of Hawai'i," *HJH* 24 (1990): 129–154; *PCA*, November 29, 1898, May 2, 1900.
- <sup>3</sup> Eleanor C. Nordyke, "Blacks in Hawai'i: A Demographic and Historical Perspective," *HJH* 22 (1988): 241–255; *Report of the Commissioner of Labor on Hawaii*, 1901, Senate Document 169 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), 147, 152, 166, 174, 212; Farber and Bailey, *The First Strange Place*, p. 164; *Hawaiian Almanac and Annual for 1902* (Honolulu, 1901), p. 164; Eleanor C. Nordyke, *The Peopling of Hawai'i*, 2d ed. (Honolulu: U of Hawai'i P, 1989), 71–73.
- <sup>4</sup> Farber and Bailey, *The First Strange Place*, 134; Broussard, "Carlotta Stewart Lai: A Black Teacher in the Territory of Hawai'i," 133–34.
- <sup>5</sup> J. Prager to William Dean Pickens, July 28, 1941, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, Part 2, NAACP Papers, Library of Congress, hereinafter cited as Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers. Although Pickens served as the national director of NAACP branches in 1941, he would later serve as the NAACP field director.
- <sup>6</sup> Prager to NAACP, September 20, 1941, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers; Memorandum, Lucille Black to Walter White, December 4, 1944, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>7</sup> Pickens to Prager, May 14, 1941, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers. For examples of racial prejudice in Hawai'i prior to World War II, consult Broussard, "Carlotta Stewart Lai, A Black Teacher in the Territory of Hawai'i," 130.
- <sup>8</sup> H. Parke Williams to Pickens, March 20, 1941, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>9</sup> Wilkins to Pickens, April 15, 1941, and Pickens to James P. Russell, April 24, 1941, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.

- <sup>10</sup> Resolution, William C. Page to Ella Baker, June 22, 1944, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers. Kenneth Sano, who played the most active role in pushing for a local branch of the NAACP, resided at 1188 Nuuanu Avenue in Honolulu, although I was unable to determine his occupation. I was also unable to find any biographical information on William Page.
- <sup>11</sup> "Application to Join NAACP," August 4, 1944, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>12</sup> Ella J. Baker to Walter White, September 7, 1944, and Baker to Kenneth Sano, September 23, 1944, carton 42, Hawai'i Branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>13</sup> *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, December 20, 1944; *Honolulu Advertiser*, December 20, 1944.
- <sup>14</sup> On racial violence during the First World War era, see William Tuttle, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1974).
- <sup>15</sup> Irving Townsend to NAACP, July 24, 1944 and Assistant Secretary, NAACP to Townsend, July 31, 1944, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>16</sup> Oscar C. Brown to NAACP, August 1, 1944; Lucille Black to White, December 4, 1944; Ella Baker to Roy Wilkins; Telegram, Ella Baker to Henry J. Green, March 22, 1945, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>17</sup> Ella Baker to Henry J. Green, March 26, 1945; Kenneth Sano to Baker, June 8, 1945, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>18</sup> Katharine Lackey to Ella Baker, February 22, 1946, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>19</sup> "Membership," August 1944, carton 42; Memorandum from Katharine Lackey regarding Hawai'i Branch NAACP, August 14, 1945, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>20</sup> Sano to Ella Baker, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>21</sup> Sano to Ella Baker, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>22</sup> Katharine Lackey to Madison S. Jones, Jr., February 19, 1946, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>23</sup> Lackey to Baker, March 24, 1946, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>24</sup> Fleming Waller to Madison Jones, Jr., June 22, 1946, carton 42; "Minutes of Branch Meeting," February 21, 1946, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>25</sup> Henry J. Fugett to NAACP, August 28, 1946, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>26</sup> Memorandum, Madison Jones to Branch department, July 29, 1946; Memorandum, Julia E. Baxter to Gloster Current, February 27, 1947, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>27</sup> Madison Jones to Department of Branches, July 16, 1946 and July 29, 1946, carton 42; Irving Townsend to NAACP, July 24, 1944, carton 42; Townsend to Ella Baker, February 11, 1946, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>28</sup> Report of Election, Honolulu branch, January 5, 1947, carton 42; Fleming Waller to Executive board, June 1, 1947, carton 42; Charles T. Mackey to

- Gloster Current, June 18, 1947, carton 42; Waller to Current, August 29, 1947, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>29</sup> Gloster Current to Lucille Neal, May 27, 1948, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>30</sup> Current to Neal, July 28m 1947, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>31</sup> Telegram, Current to Honolulu branch, February 5, 1949, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>32</sup> Transcript of telephone conversation between Current and Morris Freedman, February 7, 1949, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>33</sup> Transcript of telephone conversation between Current and Freedman, February 7, 1949, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>34</sup> Transcript of telephone conversation between Current and Freedman, February 7, 1949, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Paper.
- <sup>35</sup> Current to Christopher, March 2, 1949, carton 42; Current to Alfred Stacy, March 2, 1949, carton 42; Stacy to Current, February 10, 1949, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>36</sup> Eleanor Agnew to Current, February 8, 1949, carton 42; Robert Greene to Black, February 5, 1949, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>37</sup> Frank Davis to Roy Wilkins, April 7, 1949, carton 42, Hawai'i Branch files, NAACP Papers; *Honolulu Advertiser*, December 14, 1948. On Davis's varied career as a journalist and poet, see John Edgar Tidwell, ed. *Living' the Blues: Memoirs of a Black Journalist and Poet* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1992). On the repression of American civil liberties during the Cold War era, see Richard Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York: Oxford U P, 1990). I wish to thank professor John Bracey for bringing the papers of the Associated Negro Press to my attention.
- <sup>38</sup> Roy Wilkins to Catherine Christopher, June 20, 1949, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers; *Atlanta World*, July 16, 1949.
- <sup>39</sup> Christopher to Wilkins, June 25, 1949, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>40</sup> Memorandum, Current to Wilkins, November 18, 1949, carton 42; Wilkins to Christopher, November 29, 1949, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>41</sup> Edward Cox to NAACP, April 17, 1951, carton 42; Current to Cox, May 31, 1951, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>42</sup> Anita Flynn to Current, August 15, 1950, carton 42; Current to Flynn, August 30, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>43</sup> "Membership Status of Branches," n.d. [1947], carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.
- <sup>44</sup> *Atlanta World*, July 16, 1949; On Noah Griffin, see Broussard, *Black San Francisco*, p. 227.
- <sup>45</sup> Canceled check, \$238.70 to NAACP, April 14, 1951 and Edward Cox to

NAACP, April 17, 1951, carton 42; Current to Cox, May 3, 1951, carton 42, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.

<sup>46</sup> See Tarea Hall Pittman to Gloster B. Current, May 3, 1960, carton 29, Hawai'i branch files, NAACP Papers.

<sup>47</sup> Current to Willie Moore, May 24, 1960; "Petition for Charter [Hawai'i] NAACP, 1960;" Current to Pittman, May 25, 1960; Moore to Current, June 16, 1960, carton 29, Hawai'i Branch files, NAACP Papers; *Advertiser*, February 6, 1962; *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, March 22, 1965; *Ka Leo O Hawaii*, March 16, 1965.

