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Carlotta Stewart Lai, a Black Teacher in the Territory of Hawai‘i

DESPITE THE FLOWERING OF BLACK HISTORY and culture during the past three decades, the Black presence in Hawai‘i has remained largely obscure. Only one biography of a Black Hawaiian has been published, and no scholar, to date, has attempted to reconstruct the Black community, its leadership, or its principal institutions, such as churches, benevolent and mutual aid societies, and protest organizations.¹ Hawai‘i’s small Black population, which did not exceed 1,000 residents until the 1950 census, has been difficult to reconstruct through newspapers, manuscripts, census records, and archival sources, and has been far less attractive to scholars than the larger Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, Puerto Rican, Korean, and Portuguese communities.²

Although the number of Blacks in Hawai‘i before World War II was probably too small to constitute a cohesive community, as early as 1810, Anthony Allen, a fugitive slave from Schenectady, New York, migrated to Hawai‘i to seek his fortune. Admittedly, little is known about Allen’s life, but he became a respected merchant, married a Hawaiian woman, and served as one of the “trusted advisers” of Kamehameha the Great.³ Allen’s success, however, did not spark a sizable exodus of Blacks to Hawai‘i during the 19th century. Indeed, several dozen Black missionaries, laborers, and seamen came to Hawai‘i for various reasons, but

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only a handful apparently remained more than a few years. The vast majority of Black Americans resided in the Southern states, and, with the exception of an "exodus" to Kansas between 1870 and 1880, there was no large movement of Blacks outside of the South during the 19th century.⁴

The distance in migrating to Hawai'i, as well as the expense, made it impossible for most Blacks to even contemplate such a move. Unlike many ethnic and racial groups, such as the Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, or Puerto Ricans, who were recruited to Hawai'i as laborers and contract workers in sizable numbers, the recruitment of Black agricultural workers from the Southern United States was modest. Blacks were deliberately excluded by sugar planters and the Hawaiian legislature in 1882. After annexation, the Hawaiian Sugar Planters Association in 1901 did recruit at least 200 Blacks from Tennessee to work on sugar plantations. On at least one other occasion, a smaller group of Southern Black workers was also recruited by the Association. But Hawai'i was accessible only by ship, and the cost of passage was beyond the means of most individual Blacks who worked as sharecroppers, tenant farmers, domestic workers, and unskilled laborers. Thus, without the prospect of systematic recruitment by either American or Hawaiian industries, there was little likelihood that Hawai'i's Black population would increase proportionally to other racial groups that had migrated to the Islands. Finally, Hawai'i was not a geographical area that most Blacks, including the Black middle class, were familiar with. Unlike Mexico, Africa, the Caribbean, Canada, and South America, which received small Black in-migrations and periodic coverage in the Black press, Hawai'i was rarely cited in either Black newspapers or periodicals as a potential oasis for Black workers.⁵

T. McCants Stewart was one of the few Black Americans who believed that Hawai'i offered an ambitious man like himself greater opportunity to succeed. Born a free Black in Charleston, South Carolina in 1852, Stewart took advantage of the educational opportunities that were available to Blacks during the post-Civil War era. He attended Howard University in 1869 during its formative decade and subsequently enrolled at the University of South Carolina at Columbia where he received his undergraduate degree in 1875. After practicing law in Orangeburg, South Caro-

lina for several years with the prominent Black South Carolina congressman, Robert Brown Elliott, Stewart moved to New York, where he became a respected attorney and political leader, wrote a column for the *New York Freeman*, a Black weekly, became the first Black to serve on the Brooklyn Board of Education, and was one of the most prominent civil rights leaders in New York. In 1882, Stewart advocated Black emigration to Africa, and during that year he emigrated to Liberia himself to work with the Black nationalist leader Edward Blyden to develop the curriculum at the College of Liberia where Blyden served as president. After feuding with Blyden, however, Stewart returned to the United States in 1885, disillusioned about the prospect of future Black emigration to Africa.⁶

Restless, but also pessimistic over the future of Blacks to advance economically and politically in the United States, Stewart sailed to Hawai'i in 1898, shortly after the Islands had been annexed by the United States. He had hoped to enter politics by working through the Republican Party, to improve his legal practice, and to invest in some local industries. Stewart's arrival was noted favorably by the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, which wrote that he was accompanied by his wife Alice, "whose education was finished with three years in Paris and a daughter, an accomplished young lady."⁷ (fig. 1)

Although the *Advertiser* did not mention T. McCants Stewart's daughter by name, Carlotta Stewart accompanied her father to Hawai'i, probably at his urging, to continue her education and to begin planning her future. Carlotta was 18 when she arrived in Hawai'i in 1898. She had spent her formative years in Brooklyn, New York, along with her older brothers, McCants and Gilchrist, and she attended Brooklyn's public schools. Even though there is no record of her initial impressions upon landing in Hawai'i, Carlotta was undoubtedly struck by the contrast between Hawai'i and her native Brooklyn. Her presence in Hawai'i differed from the immigration pattern of Blacks who migrated to Hawai'i in several respects. Few Black women had come to the Islands during the 19th century. Although Betsey Stockton, the first reported Black female had arrived in Hawai'i in 1823 to work with Christian missionaries, the majority of Black settlers had been males.⁸

Yet Stewart's experience in Hawai'i was different from Black



FIG. 1. Carlotta Stewart, c. 1900. (Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C. photo.)

female immigrants in another significant respect. Although she made periodic trips to the Mainland to visit her family and relatives, Carlotta remained in the Islands to complete her education, pursue a professional career as a teacher and principal, and to settle permanently. Her life, although not a mirror of the Black experience in Hawai'i during the early 20th century, illuminates the experiences of a strata of Black Hawaiians, educated middle-class Black women, that we know little about, but also reveals some aspects of Black-Hawaiian relations, intermarriage, social relations, and white-collar and professional employment. Her experiences in Hawai'i between 1898 and 1952 provide a rich mosaic by which to examine the Black experience and to test the thesis of early writers and scholars that Hawai'i was a melting-pot and possessed virtually no racial problem.⁹

Despite its charm, Hawai'i was a peculiar setting for a young Black woman from Brooklyn, New York. Although her father had spent three years in Liberia, Carlotta had never traveled outside of the continental United States before coming to Hawai'i. While her brothers McCants and Gilchrist had attended Tuskegee Institute, the Southern vocational school established by Booker T. Washington in 1881, Carlotta resided with her father following a bitter divorce from his first wife.¹⁰

The first evidence of Stewart's activities appear in 1902 (fig. 2). In that year, she graduated from Oahu College (Punahou School). The *Oahuan*, the school annual, noted that Stewart, one of eight members in the senior class, had completed one year at the school, had been a member of the literary society, and had played on the girl's basketball team, apparently an indication of her assimilation into the school and acceptance by her peers. Moreover, the excellent preparation that she received at the school prepared her for a white-collar career. The course of study at Oahu College included classes in philosophy, religion, English, Latin, Greek, French or German, history, economics, mathematics, and science. After graduation, Carlotta completed the requirements for a Normal School certificate, which she received in 1902, and she promptly accepted a teaching position in the Practice Department of the Normal School in July. Carlotta remained at the Normal School for several years, where she taught English,

her major at Oahu College, and her name appears in the biennial *Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to the Governor of the Territory of Hawaii* between 1902 and 1924.¹¹

While surviving records do not provide a detailed account of Stewart's professional career, they offer insight into the opportunities and challenges that a Black professional woman faced in Hawai'i during the early 20th century. Stewart's annual salary in 1902 of \$660, for example, placed her comfortably in the Black middle class in both Hawai'i and on the Mainland.¹² Within four years, her salary had increased to \$900, which she supplemented by typing during her spare time.¹³ By 1908, however, her teaching salary had increased to \$100 per month, which provided not only a comfortable standard of living, but also financed extensive travel throughout the Islands when her classes were not in session, permitted occasional trips to the Mainland by ocean steamer to visit relatives, and allowed her to provide limited financial assistance to her mother and two brothers.¹⁴ Thus Stewart's income provided a degree of security and independence that few Black or Caucasian working women had achieved by the early 20th century, and it exceeded the annual salary of some Black professionals, including nurses.

Stewart had also attained respect as a competent professional woman in her own right. "Sometimes I get quite blue not having a single relative in the Islands," she wrote her oldest brother McCants in 1906. "I soon get over it, for I have such good friends. I want for nothing."¹⁵ Carlotta may have been overstating the case, but by the time that her father and stepmother left Hawai'i in 1905, she had established a network of close friendships and created an active social life. She informed McCants during the 1906 school year that in addition to teaching, she was busy with classes, vacations, camping, surfing, and frequent parties. "We took in two dances a week at the Seaside Hotel [in Honolulu] and played cards at home the other evenings or made up moonlight bathing parties," she boasted. Carlotta also attended Sunday baseball games and served as coach of the junior and senior female teams in her local community.¹⁶ Stewart's career advancement, her acceptance in the larger Hawaiian community, and her strong friendships were pivotal factors in her decision to remain in

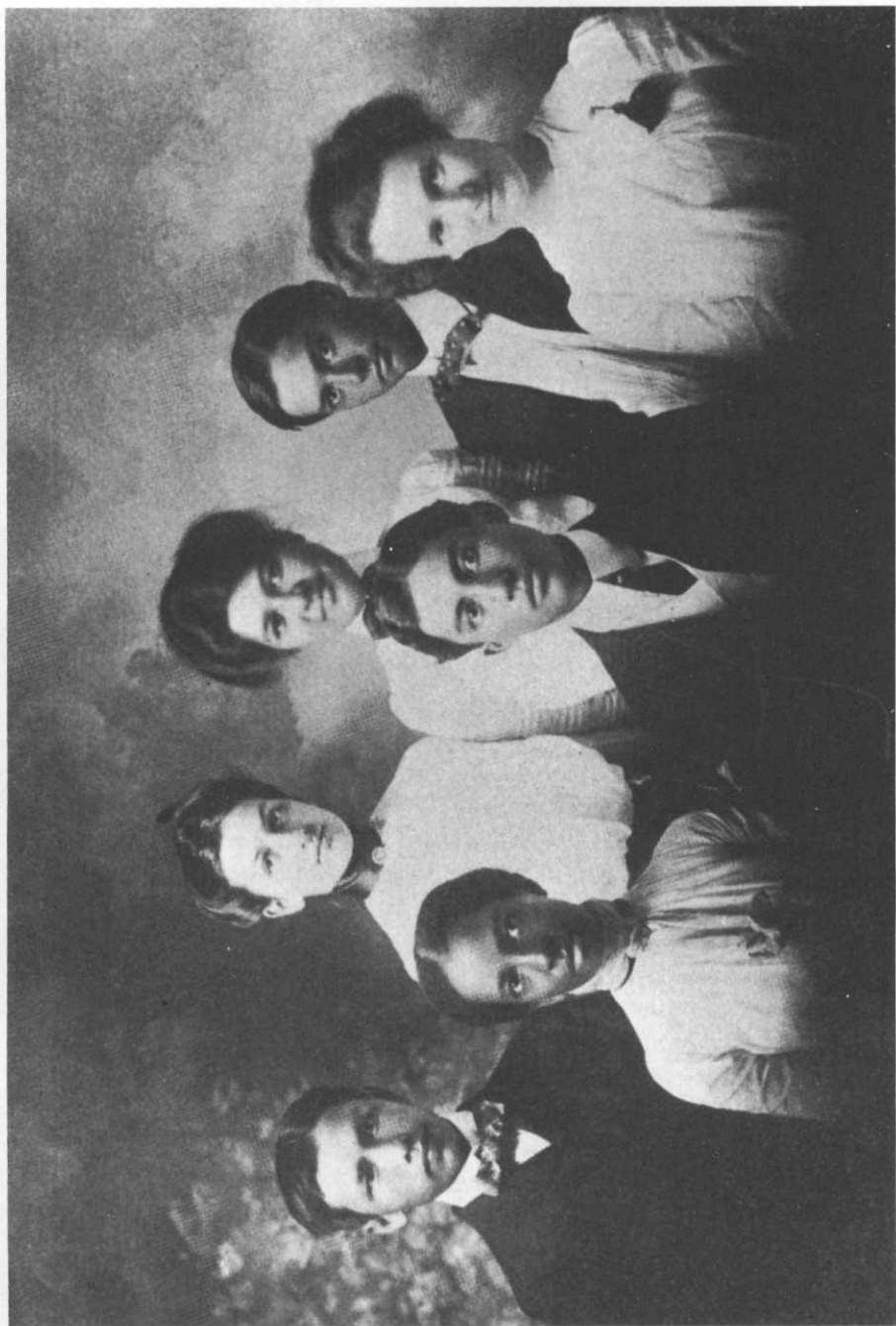


FIG. 2. Senior class picture Oahu College (Punahou School), 1902. Front row (*left to right*): Carlotta Stewart, William Heen, Mary Paty; back row (*left to right*): Ed Young, Charlotte Dodge, Harriet Hapai, George Hapai. (Cooke Library Archives, Punahou School photo.)

Hawai'i following her father's departure in 1905. The frequency with which she reported attending social functions reveals her perception that she was accepted into the social circles of her middle class peers. Carlotta's descriptions of these events also reveal a more outgoing and jovial side of her personality, rather than the staid and formal teacher and principal described in the public record.

Similarly, the ease with which Stewart obtained housing in Hawai'i revealed that while racial hostility and racial tensions were both evident during the early 1900s, a Black woman could still reside openly in an integrated community. Carlotta never attempted to pass for another race. She had resided initially with her father, who had purchased a large house in Honolulu. In time, however, she became more independent and shared a residence on Beretania Avenue in an attractive neighborhood with a young female friend and, later, a widow. "We have a pretty place here being on the main thoroughfare to the beach and cars running out here and to town pass here," she wrote McCants.¹⁷ These living arrangements allowed Stewart greater independence, but also the opportunity to save money, to interact with a variety of people, and, ultimately, to purchase property.

While conditions may have been neither difficult nor racially oppressive for a Black professional woman in Hawai'i, there was no substantial Black community before World War II, and Stewart saw few Blacks in either her classrooms or in the local community. Although Hawai'i's Black population had tripled between 1900 and 1910, from 233 to 695, and more Black professionals had come to the Islands to pursue their careers, a handful of Black professionals did not compose a community.¹⁸ But if the absence of a Black community presented particular problems in respect to dating or having a peer group of Black professionals to interact with, Stewart rarely complained. Most of her social activities, such as travel and parties, occurred in groups, relieving her of the pressure to find a companion with a comparable racial and social background.¹⁹

The absence of a Black community, however, occasionally proved an inconvenience, such as the time when Stewart wrote The Madame C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company, a Black

business that specialized in making cosmetics and hair products for Black women, requesting advice and hair preparations to counteract the effect on her hair of swimming in salt water. "These treatments," wrote the company's export manager in reply to Carlotta's inquiry, "will produce the straightened effect upon the hair and will last [a] considerable time."²⁰

Despite her assimilation into the social circle of the middle class, Carlotta remained isolated from her friends and family. Following the death of her mother Charlotte Harris Stewart in 1906, Carlotta felt distraught and guilty. Although her mother was a graduate from Wilberforce University in 1872, she struggled financially throughout much of her life because of the limited employment opportunities available to college-educated Black women in the United States. Carlotta had promised to help her mother financially following her divorce from T. McCants Stewart, an obligation, by her own admission, that she had neglected. "I should have done more for her," she lamented to her brother McCants. "You see when Papa was here [in Hawai'i], I was not allowed to write her."²¹ When T. McCants Stewart remarried in 1893, he prohibited his children from contacting their natural mother while they were under his care. "Papa made it understood that his former wife was dead when we children were small," she reminded McCants. This demand, however, resulted in strained relations between Carlotta and her father's second wife, Alice Stewart. Carlotta's attitude may explain, in part, why she did not follow her father and stepmother to London in 1905, choosing instead to remain in Hawai'i. Carlotta resented this interloper, and throughout the remainder of her life she had little to do with either her stepmother or her three stepsisters.²²

The news of her mother's death was not only disturbing, but it also triggered a feeling of alienation. As Stewart had done in the past when she desired advice and reassurance, she confided in her older brother McCants. Admittedly depressed, she lamented, "O Mac [McCants], it is terrible. I am so far away and not a soul here to comfort me, as I can not tell any one."²³ Indeed, McCants, who was four years older than Carlotta and Portland, Oregon's first Black attorney, had served as a surrogate father for his younger sister, providing advice and solace, and his encour-

agement proved particularly important to Carlotta during this difficult period.²⁴ Carlotta also complained of her rootlessness and the need for a family in 1906:

T'is terrible to think how we have been without home, mother or father, since we were babes, practically. It is hard enough for boys. But a girl certainly does need a home with mother and father until she gets one of her own.²⁵

This statement was the first indication that Carlotta resented her father's frequent absences from home and the dislocation and disunity that his peripatetic career had brought to her life. Moreover, it reinforced the emotional bond that had developed between the Stewart children, in light of T. McCants Stewart's absence and the death of Carlotta's mother.

As a consequence of her depression and emotional vulnerability, Stewart considered returning to the Mainland in 1907 to live permanently for the first time since her arrival in Hawai'i. She responded favorably to a suggestion by McCants to return to the United States, citing both personal and financial reasons. "Yes Mac, let us go East. I do not want to stay here any longer. I am too far away from loved ones."²⁶ Yet Carlotta also revealed that she was dissatisfied with her financial situation. "The Islands are not what they used to be financially any way. [I] Have thought of settling here [but] will not now," she wrote. Carlotta assured McCants that she would relocate to the Mainland no later than September.²⁷

Stewart's dissatisfaction stemmed, in part, from the impact that the Panic of 1907 had on her personal finances and on the Hawaiian economy in general. Her salary was cut three percent, and teachers were prohibited from working part-time jobs to supplement their salaries. She also noted that food prices had risen sharply and, for the first time, her debts had become a financial burden. "I have never met such a streak of ill luck," she informed McCants. "Will simply have to let everything go and start all over again."²⁸ Although these financial travails caused Carlotta's weight to drop to 109 pounds, she believed that she could weather the storm and rectify her problems. In her characteristically opti-

mistic tone, she wrote: “[I] will not let these difficulties conquer me.”²⁹

After careful reflection Stewart decided that it was not in her best interest to return to the Mainland. Despite her intermittent loneliness, the depression following the death of her mother, and her financial problems, she was an established professional woman in the Hawaiian schools, a status that she would have been unlikely to achieve in any Pacific Coast community in the early 20th century because of racial discrimination. Although still somewhat ambivalent about her decision to remain in Hawai‘i, Carlotta wrote McCants:

. . . the thought of staying out here three or four years longer wears on me at times. But I am perfectly sensible about it now as I see the situation East. I would not leave now for anything.³⁰

The young Black teacher’s decision to remain in Hawai‘i proved to be an advantageous one, for within two years she was promoted to principal of the Ko‘olau Elementary School and received an increase in salary.³¹ Stewart’s mobility in the space of seven years was an impressive achievement. While many Black women had established careers in teaching and a handful as administrators by 1909, it was unusual for a Black female at the age of 28 to serve as principal of a multiracial school. This achievement was particularly striking for a Black woman in a society where Blacks had no political influence to request jobs of this magnitude or where few Blacks resided. Stewart’s upward mobility reveals that Blacks were more likely to obtain professional jobs in Hawai‘i than in many West Coast cities, including San Francisco, Oakland, Los Angeles, Portland, and Seattle.³² Teaching and administrative positions would not be open to Blacks in most Western cities until the 1940s.

It is impossible to reconstruct Carlotta Stewart’s professional career in its entirety. Yet fragments of information taken from official reports to the Superintendent of Public Instruction, school and Island newspapers, and Carlotta’s personal correspondence provide some insight into the Hawaiian schools and her administrative career. Hawai‘i’s school-aged population, which grew rap-

idly between 1900 and 1940, reflected the Island's racial and ethnic diversity, and the backgrounds of Stewart's students were no different. In 1933, for example, the composition of her pupils included Hawaiians, Japanese, Koreans, Filipinos, Chinese, and Portuguese. In addition, 16 "Americans" (Caucasians) were listed among the student population, but no Blacks were included. It is unlikely that Stewart had contact with more than a handful of school-aged Blacks prior to World War II, and the majority were probably the children of United States military personnel. Moreover, most Black Hawaiians lived on the island of O'ahu, and, between 1916 and 1950, Carlotta resided and worked on the island of Kaua'i (fig. 3) where she was likely to encounter even fewer Afro-Americans.³³

The number of pupils who attended Carlotta's schools when she served as principal varied annually and ranged between 200 and 300 students. The *Hanamaulu School World*, for example, reported that 283 students of various races attended the Hanamaulu School where Stewart served as principal in 1933 (fig. 4). Between 1940 and 1944, however, the school's enrollment declined to 256 students. In addition to managing the school, Stewart also supervised seven classroom teachers, the school librarian, and the cafeteria manager, and taught English.³⁴ These responsibilities were a firm testament of the confidence that public school officials had in Stewart's administrative ability but also an indication of how far she had come in her career.

By any standard Carlotta Stewart's professional career was successful. Although isolated from sizable Black communities, admittedly by her own choice, Stewart excelled as both a teacher and an administrator for over four decades and established a network of professional associates throughout Hawai'i. She attended conventions of the Hawai'i Education and the Kaua'i Education Associations and read the *Hawaii Education Review*, illustrating a degree of professional interest in her field beyond the classroom. Her career advancement, as well as the respect that she was accorded in the community, were critical factors in her decision to remain in Hawai'i permanently.³⁵

Stewart's personal correspondence reveals a rather reserved woman, with little interest in community affairs and the absence



FIG. 3. Principal Carlotta Stewart Lai and the "Class of 1928," Anahola School, Kaua'i. (Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University photo.)

of a racial identity. Unlike many Black professional women, who devoted part of their careers to women's groups and benevolent societies, Carlotta Stewart was not a social reformer and never joined any organization that was designed to promote the uplift of Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Asians, Hawaiians, or women. True, Hawai'i during these years did not have chapters of the most prominent Black national organizations, such as The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), National Urban League, National Association of Colored Women, or the National Council of Negro Women. Yet Carlotta had been reared in a family of Black activists. Her brothers McCants and Gilchrist, both attorneys, were active in civil rights activities in Portland and New York, and her father had challenged successfully several Jim Crow laws in the State of New York and won the praise of Booker T. Washington.³⁶ Moreover, her aunt, Verina Morton-Jones, to whom she wrote periodically, had been a charter member of the Brooklyn chapter of the NAACP, a co-founder of the National Urban League, and active in the colored YWCA.³⁷ Thus, Carlotta's decision to avoid reform movements was atypical of the Stewarts but may have been predicated on the belief that Hawai'i did not have a serious racial problem or that she had no sizable ethnic group with whom to associate. Her lack of community activism may have also resulted not just from the fact that she did not see any significant conflict to protest about, but also because isolation had diminished part of her racial identity. Here was a Black woman who was separated not only from a family of racial activists, but also from the culture of the Black middle class. And while Carlotta never denied that she was Black or tried to pass for another racial or ethnic group, her isolation and her desire to assimilate may also explain why she did not comment on the plethora of racist editorials and cartoons that appeared in the *Honolulu Advertiser* which maligned not only Blacks, but also Puerto Ricans and Asians.³⁸

Residing in Hawai'i during the early 20th century offered few opportunities for a Black female to meet, date, or marry a Black male, and fewer still to interact with Black professionals. Thus, interracial dating and interracial marriage were both acceptable and realistic prospects, so long as Blacks and Whites did not inter-



FIG. 4. Principal Carlotta Stewart Lai and students at Hanamaulu School, Kaua'i, 1933. (Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University photo.)

marry. Indeed, cross-racial relationships were perhaps the only opportunity for a Black professional woman like Carlotta Stewart to interact with a male from a comparable social and economic background. So as Carlotta approached her 35th birthday in 1916, she married Yun Tim Lai of Chinese ancestry at Anahola, Kaua'i County.³⁹

Born in Anahola, Kaua'i in 1886, Lai, who was five years younger than Carlotta, worked as sales manager of the Garden Island Motors, Ltd., an automobile dealership in Lihue, Kaua'i, when the couple wed in 1916.⁴⁰ The circumstances surrounding Carlotta and Yun's courtship are unclear, but Stewart had been a close friend of Lai's sister for many years. The marriage was presumably a happy one, perhaps even a marriage of convenience, but produced no children, although Carlotta suspected incorrectly that she was pregnant in 1927.⁴¹ The 19-year marriage ended, however, in 1935, when Lai died suddenly in Hong Kong while visiting his parents. The circumstances surrounding Lai's death were not disclosed, and Carlotta rarely mentioned her husband in her personal correspondence.⁴² Carlotta Stewart Lai never remarried but remained in Hawai'i for the next 17 years, serving as principal and English teacher until her retirement in 1944.

Following Lai's retirement from the public schools, she began arranging her personal affairs with the expectation that she would live in Hawai'i during her final years. Apparently fearful that her health might deteriorate with advanced age, she had drawn up her will in 1943 and appointed Ruth Aki Ching, her late husband's sister, as executor and the major beneficiary, a fact that she had kept hidden even from Ching until 1952.⁴³ Lai also gave Ching legal authorization to manage her personal property. "The Trust Company will notify you that I left all my personal property to you as in my will of 1943," Carlotta informed Ching in 1952. Lai's decision to appoint Ching as the major beneficiary in her will was the result of a longstanding friendship between the two women and the close personal attachment that developed. Carlotta's lack of children or her inability to have them, as well as the physical distance that separated her from her relatives on the Mainland explains, in part, why she perceived Ching as a surrogate daugh-

ter. Responding to an inquiry from Ching concerning why she, rather than a surviving member of the Stewart family, would be named so prominently in her will, Carlotta replied straightforwardly:

You were kind to all classes—high or low. You were an outstanding person—not only in my opinion but from many, many higher than I. This is how you got into my will.⁴⁴

But Carlotta also explained that she was rewarding Ching for her friendship and loyalty. “You have been so fine and good to me and everyone,” exclaimed Carlotta, “that you deserve all and more. I made up The Will in 1943 so [I] made up my mind [to] see to things instead of waiting for the end.”⁴⁵ Thus, Lai’s will was the final testament of how dearly she loved Hawai‘i and its people, as well as those individuals who had provided emotional support and helped her to forge a sense of community.

By 1951 Lai’s health grew increasingly more fragile, and, unable to provide for herself without fear of bodily injury, she entered the Manoa Convalescent Home in 1952. “I feel safe and secure,” Carlotta wrote Ruth Ching, “but at home as you know things got beyond my strength.”⁴⁶ Lai kept a diary of her activities while a patient at the nursing home, one of only several extant diaries by Black women, and it serves as an excellent barometer of her declining health and her attempt to remain optimistic in the face of despair. “A beautiful Hawa [Hawaiian] Day,” she recorded in her first entry on New Years’ day.⁴⁷ Less than a week later, however, she wrote, “did not get to Mass. Health not good.” Similarly, on January 9, Lai’s sole entry read “so tired,” and the following day she reported “preparation to leave my large home (sold gratis) forever.”⁴⁸ Carlotta also acknowledged frankly that time had finally caught up with her and that she would probably never leave this environment. “If God spares me to return, we will have good times again,” she wrote Ruth Ching, although her declining health made this prospect an unlikely one.⁴⁹

Lai adjusted to the nursing home rapidly, and, in time, she grew fond of her surroundings. “I’m relaxed and having a good rest here with a well organized private hospital with nurses on day

duty and all nite [*sic*]," she wrote. Indeed, Lai consistently praised most areas of the nursing home, including its staff, the meals, and the physical setting. "Thanks to St. Joseph etc. for lovely home here," she recorded in her diary.⁵⁰

Lai's daily routine at the nursing home did not vary considerably. For example, she rose between 5 and 6 a.m., began each day with a prayer, read briefly, made a brief notation in her diary, and attended an early Mass when she could gather the strength. "I like the quiet of the early dawn and the Manoa Home Hospital is quiet and peaceful," she reported on January 14. Nor did Carlotta's image of the nursing home change over time. "This is the place for me," she wrote. "People are nice and the Lord led me here by St. Joseph." Aside from being disturbed by an occasionally eccentric patient, Lai rarely complained about her environment. "My greatest trial is the old lady who follows me and talks—just talks like a machine. That's my cross."⁵¹

When her health permitted it, Lai left the nursing home with other patients to shop, visit friends, and attend Mass. Indeed, Lai turned increasingly to religion as a source of strength and inspiration. She had converted to Catholicism during the early 1900s, despite the fact that her father was an ordained minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and that she visited the Priory, an Episcopal school, often as a young teacher to pray, study, and dine with other females. She had written McCants as early as 1906 that "I frequently sat around the cross and wrote my school-work" in the inner court of the Priory.⁵² Thus Lai did not embrace religion belatedly, but she clung to it even more firmly in her final year, increased her financial contribution to the Catholic Church, and devoted a portion of her day to prayer and spiritual matters.⁵³

Despite her failing health, Lai's attitude remained positive and her resolve strong. "Meals are steadily good," she recorded in mid January. The following day, however, her health had taken a turn for the worst. "Bedside prayers. A very painful night," she reported.⁵⁴ Although Carlotta never mentioned her specific ailment, her legs were in constant pain, and on some days she was completely bedridden. "Laid up all day—up and down," she

noted on January 25, and the following day was no better. She wrote succinctly: "Rested to keep warm and still pain in thigh." Two days later these problems recurred. "Not so good as pain in thigh is great."⁵⁵ Despite these setbacks, Carlotta believed that her faith in God would ultimately overcome these physical difficulties. "Thru [*sic*] God," she recorded on January 27, "I inherit the power to win."⁵⁶ Lai found that it was difficult, however, to remain optimistic about her health in the midst of her surroundings. Nor did her roommates, some of whom were terminally ill, improve her state of mind. "My only trial now—mentality of people," she noted.⁵⁷

During March and April, Lai's entries into her diary became less frequent, a signal that her health was feeble. Fearful that death was eminent, she cleared up any last minute matters relating to her estate, such as preparing a cemetery plot that had been purchased for the children of T. McCants Stewart.⁵⁸ She wrote Ruth Ching regarding her will and was apparently satisfied that she had managed her financial affairs efficiently.⁵⁹ By early May the manager of the nursing home urged Carlotta to leave the name of her personal physician in the event that her health took a turn for the worst. "The end may be near. Rested much all day," she wrote on May 4.⁶⁰ Indeed, within two weeks, her health had declined. In the final entry to her diary on May 15, Carlotta Stewart Lai noted with her usual brevity and clarity: "Up at 5:45 [a.m.]. Very poor nite [*sic*]. Rest all day. Adjusting my menu. Must prepare for Betty. Bedside prayer. Slept at 8."⁶¹ Within two months, Carlotta Stewart Lai passed away quietly on July 6, 1952.⁶²

Carlotta Stewart Lai's life is significant for several reasons. Her public career illustrates that Hawai'i was a relatively open society for educated middle class Blacks during the early 20th century, despite a small Black community that represented less than 0.2 percent of the population, and that economic opportunities were available for Black women beyond domestic work and menial labor. Few Black women were employed in teaching or administrative jobs in the Western states and territories when Lai began teaching at the Normal School in 1902. Fewer still succeeded in

moving up the ladder during their careers to become principals or administrators before World War II.⁶³

Lai's life also reveals the absence of serious racial tension and conflict in Hawai'i between Blacks and other racial and ethnic groups before the Second World War. During her five decades in Hawai'i, she did not report one instance of racial discrimination in employment, public accommodations, housing, or in the social arena, although these problems were evident with other racial and ethnic groups on the Islands. True, her education, income, status in the community, and family name may have insulated her from some forms of class or racial proscription. T. McCants Stewart had been a respected attorney and political figure in Hawai'i between 1898 and 1905, and his reputation and political contacts may have assisted Carlotta during the early stages of her career. Yet Carlotta Stewart Lai, like most Black professional women on the Mainland, succeeded in large measure on her own accord through hard work, perseverance, and the pioneering spirit to strike out on her own, which exemplified the entire Stewart family. Each member of the Stewart family had been a pioneer in his or her their respective community, and this fact was not lost on Carlotta. This was not a typical Black middle class family, and T. McCants Stewart, the family's patriarch, instilled in each of his children the desire to stake out new vistas and new frontiers, to become great men and great women, and to work for the betterment of the Black race.⁶⁴ Lai's legacy was the persistence with which she pursued her career, a career that spanned four decades, and her dedication to public education in Hawai'i.

Finally, my research reveals that it is possible to reconstruct some qualitative aspects of the Black past in Hawai'i during the late 19th and early 20th centuries before the influx of Black military personnel and civilian war workers during World War II.⁶⁵ While the paucity of source material may not permit scholars to reconstruct the history of the Black working class in Hawai'i to the same degree as the experiences of the Black middle class or the Black elite, Carlotta Stewart Lai's life and career should serve as a challenge to scholars who are interested in recovering the Black past in Hawai'i and assessing whether Blacks had the same opportunities to succeed as other ethnic and racial groups.

NOTES

- 1 Lloyd L. Lee, "A Brief Analysis of the Role and Status of the Negro in the Hawaiian Community," *American Sociological Review* 13 (Aug. 1948): 419-37; Merze Tate, "The Sandwich Island Missionaries Lay the Foundation for a System of Public Instruction in Hawaii," *Journal of Negro Education* 30 (Fall 1961): 396-405; John Milton Yinger, "Integration and Pluralism Viewed from Hawaii," *Antioch Review* 22 (Winter 1962-63): 397-410; William Atherton Du Puy, *Hawaii and Its Race Problem* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923); Kay Brundage Takara, "Who is the Black Woman in Hawaii?" in Nancy Foon Young and Judy R. Parrish, eds., *Montage* (Honolulu: General Assistance Center for the Pacific, 1977), 85-93; Eleanor C. Nordyke, "Blacks in Hawai'i: A Demographic and Historical Perspective," *HJH* 22 (1988): 241-55. The Center for Oral History of the University of Hawai'i Manoa has recently completed an oral history project on Black Hawaiians. The project, under the direction of Kathryn Takara and Michi Kodama-Nishimoto, interviewed ten older Black residents of O'ahu. See *Oral History Recorder* 5 (Summer 1988 and Winter 1988); Bobette Gugliotta, *Nolle Smith: Cowboy, Engineer, Statesman* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1971).
- 2 Sidney L. Gulick, *Mixing the Races in Hawaii, A Study of the Coming Neo-Hawaiian American Race* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Board Book Rooms, 1937); Gerald Allan Estep, *Social Placement of the Portuguese in Hawaii as Indicated by Factors of Assimilation* (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1974); Roman K. Cariaga, *The Filipinos in Hawaii: A Survey of Their Economic and Social Condition* (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1974); Blase Comacho Souza, "Trabajo y Tristeza—Work and Sorrow: The Puerto Ricans of Hawaii, 1900 to 1902," *HJH* 18 (1984): 156-73; Dennis A. Kastens, "Nineteenth Century Chinese Christian Missions in Hawaii," *HJH* 12 (1978): 61-7.
- 3 *Sixty-Fifth Annual Report for the Year 1956*, HHS (Honolulu, 1957) 26; Ralph S. Kuykendall and A. Grove Day, *Hawaii, A History*, rev. ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976) 37; R. A. Greer, "Blacks in Old Hawaii," *Honolulu* 21 (Nov. 1986): 120-21 and 183-84.
- 4 Nell I. Painter, *Exodusters, Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (New York: Norton, 1976); Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas, 1879-80* (Lawrence: Regents P of Kansas, 1978); Thomas C. Cox, *Black Topeka, Kansas, 1865-1915: A Social History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State U P, 1982).
- 5 *PCA*, 4 Apr. 1901; Ronald Takaki, *Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawaii, 1835-1920* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1983) 25-6; Edwin S. Redkey, *Black Exodus: Black Nationalist and Back-to-Africa Movements, 1890-1910* (New Haven: Yale U P, 1969); Philip J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1861* (New York: Columbia U P, 1961); William H. Pease and Jane Pease, *Black Utopia: Negro Communal Experiments in America* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1963); James W. Pilton, "Negro Settlement in British Columbia," master's thesis, U of British Columbia, 1951.

- ⁶ For biographical information on T. McCants Stewart, see William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark, Eminent, Progressive and Rising* (Cleveland, 1887) 751-59; Charles Wynes, "T. McCants Stewart: Peripatetic Black South Carolinian," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 80 (Oct. 1979): 311-17; August Meier, *Negro Thought in America* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1963) 30, 34, 36, 46, 66, 94, and 272; C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, 3d rev. ed. (New York: Oxford U P, 1974) 38-41; George B. Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes, 1877-1900* (Columbia, S.C.: U of South Carolina P, 1952) 294-95, 300, and 304-05; I. A. Newby, *Black Carolinians: A History of Blacks in South Carolina, 1895-1968* (Columbia, S.C.: U of South Carolina P, 1973) 196; Harold X. Connolly, *A Ghetto Grows in Brooklyn* (New York: New York U P, 1977) 24, 27, 29, 32, 38, and 47; T. Thomas Fortune, *Black and White: Land, Labor, and Politics in the South* (1884; rpt. Chicago: Johnson Publishing, 1970) 51-4; Emma Lou Thornbrough, *T. Thomas Fortune, Militant Journalist* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1972) 58, 82, 88, 93, 100-01, 118-19, 122, 142-43, and 235-36; Bess Beatty, *Revolution Gone Backward, The Black Response to National Politics, 1876-1896* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1987) 113, 157, and 159-66; Redkey, *Black Exodus* 123.
- ⁷ *PCA*, 29 Nov. 1898 and 2 May 1900; *Cleveland Gazette*, 15 Apr. 1893; Theophilus Gould Stewart, the prominent Black chaplain, visited Stewart shortly after he settled in Hawai'i: see Theophilus Gould Stewart, *Fifty Years in the Gospel Ministry* (Philadelphia: AME Book Concern, [1921]) 308-09.
- ⁸ *PCA*, 29 Nov. 1898; Takara, "Who is the Black Woman in Hawaii?" 86-7; Greer, "Blacks in Old Hawaii" 120-21 and 183-84.
- ⁹ Du Puy, *Hawaii and Its Race Problem* 122-23; Gulick, *Mixing the Races in Hawaii* 189-91; Ruth Tabrah, *Hawaii, A Bicentennial History* (New York: Norton, 1980) 69-70, 120, and 136.
- ¹⁰ Albert S. Broussard, "McCants Stewart: The Struggles of a Black Attorney in the Urban West," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 89 (Summer 1988): 159-79.
- ¹¹ Commencement Invitation, Oahu College, June, 1902, Stewart-Flippin papers, Moorland-Spangarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C.: hereafter cited as Stewart-Flippin Papers; Oahu College Commencement, 27 June 1902, Stewart-Flippin Papers; C. T. Rogers, Secretary, Department of Public Instruction, Territory of Hawai'i, letter to Carlotta Stewart, 23 July 1902, Stewart-Flippin Papers; Mrs. Katherine Stewart Flippin, personal interviews, 19 July 1986 and 4 June 1987; *Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to the Governor of the Territory of Hawai'i, 1902-1904* (Honolulu, 1904); Mary S. Judd, Archivist, Punahou School, telephone interview, 27 June 1989; Mary S. Judd, letter to Albert S. Broussard, 27 June 1989; *Oahuan*, 1902.
- ¹² Rogers, letter to Stewart, 23 July 1902, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ¹³ M. Bobbitt, letter to Carlotta Stewart, 13 Nov. 1906, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ¹⁴ Carlotta Stewart, letter to McCants Stewart, 4 Mar. and 12 Aug. 1906, 17 Jan. 1907, 27 and 4 Sept. 1907, Stewart-Flippin Papers. On the economic status of Black female wage-earners, see David M. Katzman, *Seven Days A Week, Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York: Oxford U P, 1978) 184-222; Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow, Black Women*,

- Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); William H. Harris, *The Harder We Run, Black Workers Since the Civil War* (New York: Oxford U P, 1985) 65, 121-22, 135, and 183; Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Women in White: Racial Conflict and Cooperation in the Nursing Profession, 1890-1950* (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1989) 93-4.
- ¹⁵ Carlotta Stewart, letter to McCants Stewart, 4 Mar. 1906, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
 - ¹⁶ Carlotta Stewart, letters to McCants Stewart, 12 Aug. 1906 and 17 Jan. 1907, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
 - ¹⁷ Carlotta Stewart, letters to McCants Stewart, 11 Feb. 1907, 4 Mar. 1906, and 4 Sept. 1907., Stewart-Flippin Papers; Stewart, *Fifty Years in the Gospel Ministry* 308-09.
 - ¹⁸ Eleanor C. Nordyke, *The Peopling of Hawaii* (Honolulu: U P of Hawaii, 1977) Table 3; Nordyke, "Blacks in Hawai'i" 242; Gugliotta, Nolle Smith 70, 96-104, 119, and 139; Hubert H. White, "Negroes in Hawaii," *Ebony* (July 1959): 25-34.
 - ¹⁹ Carlotta Stewart, letter to McCants Stewart, 4 Sept. 1907, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
 - ²⁰ Export Manager, Madame C. J. Walker Manufacturing Co., letter to Carlotta Lai, 15 July 1926, Stewart-Flippin Papers. A brief biographical sketch of Madame C. J. Walker and her business enterprise is contained in Rayford W. Logan and Michael P. Winston, eds., *Dictionary of American Negro Biography* (New York Norton, 1982) 621.
 - ²¹ Carlotta Stewart, letter to McCants Stewart, 17 Jan. 1907, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
 - ²² Carlotta Stewart, letter to McCants Stewart, 17 Jan. 1907, and Alice Stewart, letter to Carlotta Stewart, Mar. 24, 1927, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
 - ²³ Carlotta Stewart, letter to McCants Stewart, 17 Jan. 1907, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
 - ²⁴ Broussard, "McCants Stewart" 157-59.
 - ²⁵ Carlotta Stewart, letter to McCants Stewart, 12 Aug. 1906, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
 - ²⁶ Carlotta Stewart, letter to McCants Stewart, 17 Jan. 1907, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
 - ²⁷ Carlotta Stewart, letter to McCants Stewart, 17 Jan. 1907, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
 - ²⁸ Carlotta Stewart, letter to McCants Stewart, 22 Oct. 1907, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
 - ²⁹ Carlotta Stewart, letter to McCants Stewart, 27 Sept. 1907, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
 - ³⁰ Carlotta Stewart, letter to McCants Stewart, 11 Feb. 1907, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
 - ³¹ County Clerk, letter to Carlotta Stewart, Principal, Ko'olau Public School, 7 Sept. 1909, Stewart-Flippin Papers; *Garden Island*, 19 Sept. 1911, 12 Mar. 1912, and 14 Jan. 1913: copies in Stewart-Flippin Papers.

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- ³³ *Hanamaulu School World*, 2 June 1933, and *Hanamaulu School Grand Reunion*, July 28-29, 1989, Kaua'i Historical Society; *Garden Island*, 11 June 1944 and 19 June 1945; Nordyke, "Blacks in Hawaii" 242.
- ³⁴ *HSB*, 26 Aug. 1926; *Hanamaulu School World*, 2 June 1933; *Schools of Kauai, 1940-1944*, Stewart-Flippin Papers; *Kauai High School Commencement Exercises*, 7 June 1926, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ³⁵ Program, *8th Annual Convention of the Hawaii Education Association, Honolulu, Dec. 28-30, 1927*, copy in Stewart-Flippin Papers; *Annual Convention of the Kauai Education Association, 28 Oct. 1927*, copy in Stewart-Flippin Papers; *Hawaii Educational Review* 16 (June 1928).
- ³⁶ On the role of Black women in benevolent and reform societies see Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, *Afro-American Women of the South and the Advancement of the Race, 1895-1925* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1989); Dorothy Sterling, ed., *We are Your Sisters; Black Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Norton, 1984) 418-50; Gerda Lerner, "Community Work of Black Club Women," *Journal of Negro History* 59 (April 1974): 158-67; Darlene Clark Hine, *When the Truth is Told: A History of Black Women's Culture and Community in Indiana, 1875-1950* (Indianapolis: The National Council of Negro Women—Indianapolis Section, 1981); Darlene Clark Hine, "To Be Gifted, Female, and Black," *Southwest Review* 67 (Autumn 1982): 357-69.
- ³⁷ Verina Morton-Jones, letters to Carlotta Stewart Lai, 19 Nov. and 31 Oct. 1926, Stewart-Flippin Papers; Nancy J. Weiss, *The National Urban League, 1910-1940* (New York: Oxford U P, 1974) 320; Harold X. Connolly, *A Ghetto Grows in Brooklyn* 83, 94-5, and 99.
- ³⁸ *HA*, 7 Jan. and 3 and 4 Apr. 1901, 5 Mar. 1903, and 22 Jan. 1924; See, also, Katherine F. Gerould, "Honolulu: The Melting Pot," *Scribner's Magazine* 59 (May 1916): 517-37. Gerould's article is typical of the racism that many American writers expressed toward the Hawaiian people. For an analysis of Hawaiian newspapers, including the racist views of *HA*, see Helen G. Chapin "Newspapers of Hawai'i 1834 to 1903: From He Liona to the Pacific Cable," *HJH* 18 (1984): 47-86.
- ³⁹ Thomas A. Burch, Hawaii Department of Health, letter to Dorothy Porter, Curator, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, 7 Mar. 1973, Stewart-Flippin

- Papers. For a broad survey of interracial marriage in Hawai'i, see Romanzo C. Adams, *Interracial Marriage in Hawaii: A Study of the Mutually Conditioned Processes of Acculturation and Amalgamation* (New York: Macmillan, 1937).
- ⁴⁰ Verina Morton-Jones, letter to Carlotta Stewart Lai, 27 Mar. 1927, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁴¹ Obituary of Yun Tim Lai, n.d. [1935], unnamed clipping, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁴² Obituary of Yun Tim Lai, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁴³ Carlotta Stewart, letter to Ruth A. Ching, n.d. [1952], Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁴⁴ Carlotta Stewart, letter to Ruth A. Ching, n.d., 1952, Stewart-Flippin Papers; Anthony Yun Seto, letter to Dr. Sau Yee Chang, 28 Dec. 1952, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁴⁵ Carlotta Stewart, letter to Ruth A. Ching, n.d. [1951-52], Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁴⁶ Carlotta Stewart, letter to Ruth A. Ching, n.d. [1952], Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁴⁷ Carlotta Stewart, Diary, 1 Jan. 1952, Stewart-Flippin Papers. Only one diary by a Black woman has been published in book form: see Ray Allen Billington, ed., *The Journal of Charlotte Forten, A Free Negro in the Slave Era* (London: Collier Books, 1961).
- ⁴⁸ Carlotta Stewart, Diary, 6, 9, and 10 Jan. 1952, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁴⁹ Carlotta Stewart, letter to Ruth A. Ching, n.d. [1951-52], Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁵⁰ Carlotta Stewart, Diary, 12 Jan. 1952, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁵¹ Carlotta Stewart, Diary, 14 and 15 Jan. 1952, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁵² Carlotta Stewart, Diary, 6 and 13 Jan. 1952, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁵³ Carlotta Stewart, letter to McCants Stewart, 4 Mar. 1906, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁵⁴ Carlotta Stewart, Diary, 13 and 16 Jan. 1952, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁵⁵ Carlotta Stewart, Diary, 17 and 18 Jan. 1952, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁵⁶ Carlotta Stewart, Diary, 25 and 26 Jan. 1952, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁵⁷ Carlotta Stewart, Diary, 27 and 28 Jan. 1952, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁵⁸ Carlotta Stewart, Diary, 9 Mar. 1952, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁵⁹ Carlotta Stewart, Diary, 18 Mar. 1952, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁶⁰ Carlotta Stewart, Diary, 27 Mar., 5 and 16 Apr., and 4 May 1952, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁶¹ Carlotta Stewart, Diary, 4 May 1952, Stewart-Flippin Papers.
- ⁶² Carlotta Stewart, Diary, 15 May 1952, Stewart-Flippin Papers; HA, 8 July 1952.
- ⁶³ Thomas A. Burch, letter to Dorothy Porter, 7 Mar. 1973, Stewart-Flippin Papers. The author's request for an official death certificate from the Hawai'i Department of Public Health was denied. Birth and death records are provided only for members of the immediate family. Under Hawai'i law, 75 years must pass before these documents can be provided to researchers.

⁶⁴ de Graaf, "Race, Sex and Region" 285-313.

⁶⁵ Broussard, "McCants Stewart" 157-60.

⁶⁶ See the interviews that were conducted by the Center for Oral History at the University of Hawai'i Manoa. The interviews with Bertha Dunson, Ernest Golden, and Lucille Maloney were particularly useful in describing the racial discrimination that Blacks encountered in Hawai'i during the World War II and the post-war era.