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Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism And The Politics Of Sovereignty And Indigeneity (Narrating Native Histories)



Synopsis

In the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act (HHCA) of 1921, the U.S. Congress defined "native Hawaiians" as those people with at least one-half blood quantum of individuals inhabiting the Hawaiian Islands prior to 1778. This "blood logic" has since become an entrenched part of the legal system in Hawai'i. *Hawaiian Blood* is the first comprehensive history and analysis of this federal law that equates Hawaiian cultural identity with a quantifiable amount of blood. J. Kāhalaui explains how blood quantum classification emerged as a way to undermine Native Hawaiian (Kanaka Maoli) sovereignty. Within the framework of the 50-percent rule, intermarriage "dilutes" the number of state-recognized Native Hawaiians. Thus, rather than support Native claims to the Hawaiian islands, blood quantum reduces Hawaiians to a racial minority, reinforcing a system of white racial privilege bound to property ownership. Kāhalaui provides an impassioned assessment of how the arbitrary correlation of ancestry and race imposed by the U.S. government on the indigenous people of Hawai'i has had far-reaching legal and cultural effects. With the HHCA, the federal government explicitly limited the number of Hawaiians included in land provisions, and it recast Hawaiians' land claims in terms of colonial welfare rather than collective entitlement. Moreover, the exclusionary logic of blood quantum has profoundly affected cultural definitions of indigeneity by undermining more inclusive Kanaka Maoli notions of kinship and belonging. Kāhalaui also addresses the ongoing significance of the 50-percent rule: Its criteria underlie recent court decisions that have subverted the Hawaiian sovereignty movement and brought to the fore charged questions about who counts as Hawaiian.

Book Information

Series: Narrating Native Histories

Paperback: 264 pages

Publisher: Duke University Press Books (November 7, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0822340798

ISBN-13: 978-0822340799

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.6 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.9 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #525,065 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #46 in Books > Law >

Administrative Law > Indigenous Peoples #291 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics &

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“Hawaiian Blood is an important work that addresses the racialization of Hawaiians in a way that no other work has done. J. Kāhulani Kauanui reveals how the fifty-percent blood quantum continues to divide the Native Hawaiian community and how it is affecting current court decisions and legislation. These analyses are crucial for the Hawaiian community as it continues to move to define itself and to exercise self-determination and sovereignty.”—Noenoe K. Silva, author of *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* “Hawaiian Blood tells a fascinating and important story that has not received sufficient attention in the historical research on Hawai`i nor in the work on indigenous peoples more generally. Well written, accessible to students and sophisticated in its analysis, this book offers provocative new insights and theoretical perspectives on how we think about and use notions of race, blood, and belonging.”—Sally Engle Merry, author of *Colonizing Hawai`i: The Cultural Power of Law*

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J. Kāhulani Kauanui, currently an associate professor of Anthropology and American Studies at Wesleyan University, has had numerous essays published in various books including *Recognition, Sovereignty Struggles, and Indigenous Rights in the United States: A Sourcebook*; *Decolonizing Native Histories*; and *Beyond the Frame: Women of Color and Visual Representation*. In this, her first book, she pulls no punches in her analysis of the American empire and how it has operated in

Hawaii. She argues that blood quantum racial classification is used as a proxy for ancestry, with destructive political consequences for indigenous peoples. Her primary focus being on the legal construction of Hawaiian indigeneity in order to analyze the implications for historical claims to land and sovereignty, an argument she more than backs up. While the book revolves around the passage of the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920, chapter one serves as context, contrasting how Hawaiians use genealogy to determine if one is Hawaiian as opposed to the "blood quantum" method devised by the law. As the author notes, the blood quantum method is designed to displace the indigenous form of identification. (38) Furthermore, she notes that genealogy plays a crucial role in Hawaiian political representation, which would account for why the U.S. government did (and continues to do) everything it can to discredit this and come up with an alternate method of determining who is and is not Hawaiian. (63) Chapter two also serves to contextualize the HHCA by discussing issues of depopulation, rehabilitation, and land entitlement, as well as those of race, indigeneity, and citizenship. (32) As Kauanui notes, land which was to be used for rehabilitation of natives was the land sugar plantation owners wanted to keep as their leases were soon to expire. (69) Chapter three details the first hearing on a proposal of rehabilitation before the House Committee on Territories. (33) Chapter four discusses the second hearing, in which the issue of just who is Hawaiian is debated. At the heart of this is a discussion of racial mixing and assimilation. Interestingly there was a proposal (it did not pass) to set the blood quantum at 100%. Chapter five looks at how the HHCA was recreated (and the advent of the 50% rule) in order to get it to pass Congress. Chapter six details the implications of the HHCA on contemporary Hawaiian politics. This is a very well written argument which is quite easy to follow for both the specialist and the lay reader alike. Kehaulani's argument is easy to follow and she conveniently points out what she is arguing not only in the introduction to the book, but in the introduction to each chapter. Indeed, she lays her case out in lawyer like fashion, moving methodically from one piece of evidence to the next, transitioning expertly and reminding the audience of the relation to the overall argument. Best of all, you do not need to be a specialist in the history of the US (or Hawaii) to follow along.

The book's informative & supports what has & is happening in Hawai'i. It shores up the reasons why the Hawaiian people are at a disadvantage, especially when it comes to land & land holdings. The United States action that led to the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy complicates the land issues relating to the Hawaiian people's rightful claims. The USA's disregard and discrimination toward Hawaiians is appalling, embarrassing to me & many others who thought

we served a just and rightful government as veterans and citizens, only to find out that the government casually, and forcefully discriminates against ethnic groups, as in this instance the Hawaiian people for the benefit of a few and the benefit of certain populations who are monied. The author empathizes the racism and inequality practiced in America's past history and present day practices! Blood quantum is a practice used to ensure Hawaiians will continue to lose land rights today & in the future.

Thanks for this treatment of the subject by a Hawaiian. The topic was detailed with the attention of an expert and patriot. The sad details of American involvement in this travesty simply made me sick. I am glad to know the details from such a knowledgeable source and with historical detail. Thank you again.

great read.challenges the BIA approach . A must read.

Excellent Read. Self-Determination is examined and it hits home for those of us who are struggling with figuring out who we are. Powerful and Mind blowing.

This book raises a lot of important issues the average American is not aware of... like the blood quantum set up by people not native Hawaiian, and the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom by the US government/marines and the forced annexation in 1898. Native Hawaiians are genuine, lovely people, and American presence is destroying their land.

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