

Interview

JOHN Osorio

R-1

(shot 1)

QUESTION: 00:06 John; if a new plebiscite were held today in 2004, let's say in August of 2004, you've been teaching Hawaiian students now for a long time. You've been—

OSHIRO: 00:23 M-hm.

QUESTION: 00:23 --teaching Hawaiian studies for a long time. What do you think would happen?

OSHIRO: 00:28 Well, if you're asking what the residents of the State of Hawaii would—how they would vote, I would imagine um—and it would depend, I think, on the—on the questions they got. I mean, if it was the same kind of questions that were asked back then, you know, territory or state—stay a territory or—or become a state, or if it was actually a plebiscite in which um, you know, uh, independence might be an option, I'm not sure that uh, independence would outvote um, staying a state of the United States. And ... that would be taking into consideration the fact that Hawaiians still are only about fifth of the population of the State of Hawaii, at least at this point.

(shot 2)

QUESTION: 01:10 Let's talk about Hawaiians, that fifth of the population of Hawaiians. How would they vote? Do you think they would vote overwhelmingly for independence today?

OSHIRO: 01:19 Um, and that—okay, if—if the—if the choices were independence and statehood, I really couldn't say for sure. If there were more than those choices, including free association or other kinds of relationships to the United States that did not involve statehood, um, I believe we would—we would vote for a different relationship.

(Shot 3)

QUESTION: 01:43 Listening to you and Tom talk before, the first effort to gain statehood for Hawaii took place during the Monarchy in 1854.

OSHIRO: M-hm.

QUESTION: 01:53 Why was it stopped? Why didn't Hawaii become a state in 1854?

OSHIRO: **01:55** Well, first of all, this would have required um, this would require—would have required some kind of Congressional action in the first place from the United States. And this—every ... most of what we—um, when we look at—at that particular event, what we actually see are um, some real attempts to stave off what were called—referred to at that point as um, almost an invasion of these people from California, people who—disappointed in the gold rush who were coming here. And many of them actually talking about overthrowing the government—filibusters, they were called, yeah. Um, the attempt was to um ... uh, the King Kamehameha, who was at that point really um, on his deathbed—I mean, he was—he was dying um ... gone through the Mahele and all of those other things, um, the king is being presented this—this plan as a—as an alternative to the loss of sovereignty by—by a violent overthrow um, by this small group of Americans who were present in the kingdom. Um, become a part of the United States, insist on statehood. So you go in with something, you go in with—with strength. Now, would the United States have uh, ratified this annexation treaty back then? N—nobody's ever really examined whether that was even possible at that point. My suspicion is that, you know, that it would have been laughed at in the halls of Congress. Um, and as far as the King was concerned, before he could really uh, act—enact it, he—he died. The—the succeeding mo'i, um, Alexander Liholiho, just—he just forgot about—I mean, he knew it existed and he just basically ignored it, because he had absolutely no interest.

QUESTION: **03:32** And he in turn tried to align Hawaii with the British.

OSHIRO: With Britain; yeah.

QUESTION: If I'm not mistaken.

OSHIRO: Yes; that's correct.

(shot 4)

QUESTION: **03:38** Let's go to the next move. The Home Rule Party following—

OSHIRO: M-hm.

QUESTION: **03:40** --following annexation. The Home Rule Party is insisting on—they're sending Robert Wilcox, a revolutionist, to Washington. They're insisting on Hawaiian language down at the—

OSHIRO: That's right.

QUESTION: --Legislature.

OSHIRO: Absolutely.

QUESTION: And they're asking to join the union as a state. How in the hell did that happen?

OSHIRO: **03:58** It happened uh, mostly because of this um—the way the territorial franchise um, was—was worded, uh, basically it looked like a democr—it looked like a state, except for a couple of things. One, there was no representation uh, uh, real representation in Congr—in—in the Senate in Congress. And two, the governor was appointed by the President of the United States. If the governor is not appointed by the President of the United States and is elected by popular vote, considering the fact that the Home Rule Party had really uh, pretty much controlled the Legislature, both the Territorial Senate and the le—and—and the House of Representatives, clearly we—the Home Rule Party would elect the governor, no veto of Home Rule Party legislation. Governor vote—uh, vetoed all but—uh, if—if memory serves, he vetoed all but four pieces of legislation that came out of the Home Rule Party between 1900 and 1902. So it's basically about home rule. It's basically about, okay, we'll be a state, we'll be a part of the United States, but we will—Hawaiians will actually control what happens here politically. And it would be turning the tables, basically, on that uh, that whole sugar uh, plantation cartel that had taken control of the governor, and turn the tables on them and actually rule by a popular vote here. It wouldn't be the kingdom, it wouldn't be the restoration of monarchy, but it would be like the second best thing.) Um, that was the real reason for the support of statehood then. And—and Wilcox himself, you know, was really interesting. Um ... h—he wasn't the kind of guy who get that done in Congress. But really, there wasn't anybody who could have done that in Congress in 1900. The Republicans, of course—um, the Republican Party made a big deal about Wilcox' ineffectiveness in Congress, and how that it would much more effective if they were running things. And in—and in very real terms, that was also pretty true. Uh, the people in the Republican Party had a lot more influence over Congress than the Home Rule Party people ever did.

QUESTION: **05:57** But there's craft and guile there. You have to—

OSHIRO: Oh, yeah.

QUESTION: --expect—

OSHIRO: Oh, well, you know, you can—you can laugh about it and—and dislike them all at the same time.

QUESTION: No, but in the Home Rule Party there's craft and guile—

OSHIRO: Yeah; there's craft and guile there.

QUESTION: That's really impressive.

OSHIRO: **06:09** They were looking—they in fact at one point um, Wilcox, I believe, was the one who suggested that they change their name from the Home Rule Party to the Republican Home Rule Party. He did. And that was in—in 19—just before the 1902 elections.

(shot 5)

QUESTION: **06:23** As a Hawaiian historian, how do you deal with Jonah Kuhio Kalaniana'ole? And this was a man who had risen up to try to put the Queen back on the throne, if I remember correctly.

OSHIRO: **06:36** He was the nephew of—you know, he was the nephew of the Queen, he was a nephew of the royal family. Um, given the way things play out, he could even have been mo'i. You know, I mean, given the way you know, people lived and died in those days, he could have been King. Um, but Kalaniana'ole was also you know, very much a prag—pragmatic individual. Most of the biographies about him portray him as uh, an astute politician, somebody who um, understood the way power was playing out and—and who had it. Um ... the biographers talk about his—his attempts really uh ... in playing ball with the Republicans. There's—there's several things that really need to be understood. One is that he comes from a ... a privileged class of Hawaiians, and in some ways the Republicans appealed to that landed class of native Hawaiians and say, we're not the threat. You know, you're more like us than you are the—like for instance, the Japanese or the Chinese, who were—you know, who were ca—you know, who were workers here, who were members of that class. You're more like us, and you have your interests to protect here. There's that.

QUESTION: That's [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

OSHIRO: 07:47 That's—that's—but—but Kalaniana'ole also ... was very resentful of them at the same time. You know, he didn't—he didn't consider himself a Haole. He considered himself as—as attempting to—to use the Republican Party for his own ends. His ends, of course, being the eventual um, securing of a Hawaiian Homes Act, which is ... you know, for—for all of its failure, is still probably the crowning ... piece of his—of his career in Congress.

QUESTION: 08:14 And you think that was more important to him than statehood?

OSHIRO: 08:18 Yes, I think it was more important than him—to him than statehood. Actually ... he is a pragmatic person. Consider this; this is a person who goes to Congress uh, you know, goes to Congress, has no vote. Can speak, can lobby, can play cards with these guys, can get together with them. He—he talks to them, he knows that—that they're not gonna pass a statehood [CHUCKLES] in the 1910s or the nine—or ri—right up until 1920. What can be gotten? You know, he is a pragmatic individual. What can be gotten? Statehood, no; but land, yeah. That's something that's possible. Um, I—I'm certain that if he'd lived much longer, he would not have been as uh, you know, particularly happy with the way things turned out. Um, but there's no question that at some point he decided that ... that act, that—that Homestead Act was going to be the thing he would get, come hell or high water. 09:10

[GENERAL CONVERSATION]

(Shot 6)

QUESTION: 09:18 Kamokila Campbell, I believe, is the only sort of important voice that I can think of who was speaking out against statehood in the post-World War II period consistently, and again and again. Why wasn't there more—and we just heard another scholar say that there were few Hawaiian voices speaking out against statehood in the post-World War II period. Why was that?

OSHIRO: 09:44 I think there's a gen—there are several reasons. I think there's a general silence among Hawaiians politically about many, many things that—that comes as a result, not so much of the overthrow and—and the imposition of—of the territory, but as a result of uh, of—of other things after that, particularly the—the—the Massey case. Um, th—the near imposition of martial law in Hawaii in the 1930s, that there's—there's really a sense uh, among many Hawaiians that you know, um ... th—th—the—that really, Haole society is a very dangerous kind of thing. Um, you know, they can—they can pick up our people

from the street and beat us to death, and nothing happens to them. Um, there's that kind of um, that's that kind of understanding. But I think it's more complicated than that. I think it's also complicated um, by—by the bombing of Pearl Harbor and by what happens ... I think—and this is not something that I've ever studied or anything that I can speak authoritatively to. But I think that what happens among many Hawaiians is a sense of um ... if not an absolute identification with America after Pearl Harbor, um, a closer sense of kinship as a result of uh, the fact that we are attacked. It's not just the fleet, you know, it's our land. It's Japanese bombers attacking our land. Um ... I think those things have a lot to do with um ... really ... there's the silence, but then if—if you are going to speak up about anything, it really wouldn't be against statehood so much as it would be um, you know, about trying to preserve as much as possible the way things are. And not letting them get any worse.

(shot 7)

QUESTION: 11:30 Well, what about the argument—and I'll play the devil's advocate here—that statehood was good for Hawaiians, that statehood—that it's closer, if you will, proximity to the United States and some of the currents in the United States—the native American movement, the civil rights movement, the Black—the African American pride movement and so forth. Have all fed to some degree the Hawaiian renaissance?

OSHIRO: 11:57 I think you'd get really different answers from different people. Um, my own perspective is that if—if statehood was good for Hawaiians, it was only—it was only slightly better than the situation they had before. I mean, to the extent that we have been able ... to the extent that we have been able as uh, as—a part of the State of Hawaii to resurrect our language, uh, to resurrect our sense of history, to fund these things, um, to reach out and actually talk about sovereignty and to feel free enough um, you know, free enough in our own society to do that, whereas I think, you know, um, the situation among many of our people in—during the Territorial period was that you didn't say things against the oligarchy. To the extent that statehood shifts and—and—and erodes that—that power of the oligarchy, really, to control how people are speaking and thinking and talking, and—and what they learn in schools, and—and what the curriculum is, um, I think there's been a benefit. But you know—and this is really important um ... it's not like having your own kingdom.

(shot 8)

QUESTION: 13:05 Of course not. One other point I'd like to ask you about. In 1976, I can remember this so clearly, the two-hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of

Independence, with financing in large part, federal financing of the Bicentennial Commission of a double-hull canoe proves once again [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. I mean, an American event helped give a kick in the ass to the Hawaiian renaissance.

OSHIRO: 13:37 Well, you know, and—and it certainly should. We feel same way. I mean, uh, we think that um, that—that the American government should, you know, help to sponsor and promote um, so—Hawaiian sovereignty. We welcome federal funds.

QUESTION: 13:53 What's the future of Hawaiian sovereignty within the context of statehood? Can you see it working?

OSHIRO: 14:00 I—yes. I—I absolutely can. I mean, uh, I absolutely think that the sovereignty movement is growing stronger. But the other thing that I would uh, would raise a question about would be the future of the United States. Um, w—will—will—how long—much more—h—much longer will the republic uh, remain in its present form? Um, is it—you know, I've—I've heard people talk about um ... and this has been very, very interesting, uh, people actually mentioning the idea of—of other states looking to secede because they have, you know, um, a much more sort of um, regional identification within the state and—and much less of a federal identification. Uh, I don't know how, you know, how that's going to play off, and I—and I don't know that anybody knows for sure. I know that the United States is entering into a very different kind of era than it had before. And I'm reminded of—of older republics who have become empires. I wonder about those things as well.

(Shot 9)

14:57

[GENERAL CONVERSATION]

15:50 [END]