

Interview  
JOHN WHITEHEAD  
December 18, 2005  
Tape 4

QUESTION: John, could you tell us again about [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

WHITEHEAD: Okay; yeah, yeah. Of course, it's often said that—that—that people never had an opportunity to vote for a kingdom. But we're—we're faced with this issue of what would the kingdom look like, how would it be organized, who would have power, who would vote. Uh, and so in reality, you really can't vote for a dream; you can only vote for something that's defined. Because if you vote for a dream, until it's defined, you stay with what you have. For example, the people of Puerto Rico have voted repeatedly against statehood. And so what are they left with; they're left with what they have. Which is ... a completely—some—something called a commonwealth. Which nobody's quite sure what one is. Uh, and so until the people of Puerto Rico define something other than commonwealth or statehood—they've already [UNINTELLIGIBLE] statehood, so they'll stay—so they end up staying with commonwealth.

QUESTION: Just for our purposes—I know you don't claim to be an expert on this, but could you describe briefly what form of government and what the history of Hawaii is from 1887 through annexation in 1900? [UNINTELLIGIBLE]

WHITEHEAD: Well, what I can say, which is when I'm asked to give talks on the Pacific ... that Hawaii underwent the greatest demographic transformation possibly in world history between the years of 1876 and 1890 to 93. In 1876, the Kingdom of Hawaii was a kingdom of which the overwhelming majority of the people were Hawaiian. I think it was something like ninety percent Hawaiian, and ten percent Haole or other. Then there was the Reciprocity Treaty, which led to the great influx of Chinese and Japanese workers. I think the year is 1890, as far as census figures go, that Hawaiians are no longer a majority in their own kingdom. By '93 and '98, Hawaiians are a distinct minority within the Kingdom. And I think that democrat—demographic event uh ... has been extremely difficult to know what to do with. What do you do when you're no longer—when you're a minority in your own land? And that, I think, is the—the question that has ... that was—that was an issue in the days of the Kingdom, in the days of the Territory, and in the current time.

QUESTION: [UNINTELLIGIBLE]

WHITEHEAD: I don't know of any other nation in the world that went—that underwent such a change in the makeup of its population in such a short time. It was truly unprecedented.

QUESTION: John, what do you see as the international implications of statehood for Hawaii? And I was wondering also [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

WHITEHEAD: And I [UNINTELLIGIBLE] the Cuban [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. I can talk about America's role in the Pacific and Hawaii's statehood.

QUESTION: [UNINTELLIGIBLE]

WHITEHEAD: Okay. Well, as far as what statehood meant on the international scene; in 1946, the Christian Science Monitor published a large feature on the issue of statehood for Hawaii. This was when the Larcade Committee hearings had started. And what the Christian Science Monitor said was, Statehood for Hawaii will tell the world what America's posi—position in the Pacific is. If the Congress votes to make Hawaii a state, this will be a statement to the world that America intends to have a prominent role in the Pacific. If it withholds statehood from Hawaii, this will be an indication that the United States is not sure of what its role will be in the Pacific. So I think statehood for Hawaii eventually did connote that prominent American role in Pacific affairs. Strangely enough, someone who also echoed that in 1966 was Lyndon Johnson, President of the United States, who said that he had earlier in the 50s been opposed to statehood for Hawaii, because he thought America's world role was totally tied to Europe, and that he had opposed statehood for Hawaii for that reason. By the late 50s, he claimed he saw America's role as being involved in the Pacific, and that's why he favored statehood. Well, we can in some way say that that was Johnson's tragic vision. That led to his involvement in the Vietnam War and the downfall of his administration. So whether this has been positive or not, we could debate. But I think that as far as Hawaii's international implications that it's just that; that it is a permanent American role in the Pacific.

QUESTION: Any thoughts about these [UNINTELLIGIBLE].

WHITEHEAD: Well, certainly the East West Center was then seen as an institutionalization of that American role in the Pacific. Uh, and when Johnson spoke in '66 here, it was inaugurating the East West Center. Now, since that time—I don't have the full story, but I know the East West Center has had its up and downs. Uh, in the 80s when I interviewed people in Hawaii, and I said, Well, what's the

role of the East Center?, they said, Well, today it's where the East meets the East. It's where people from Indonesia and Japan talk together. It's not where people from the East talk to people from America. And then I—I know it went into a period of almost ... not being renewed, and is in a—in a current revival. So I think in many ways, the vitality of the East West Center is also a marker for the vitality of that American role in the Pacific.

QUESTION: I'm out of questions.

[INDISTINCT CONVERSATION]

WHITEHEAD: This me or you?

QUESTION: You.

WHITEHEAD: Oh.

QUESTION: Do you have any thoughts about an international perspective on Hawaiian sovereignty now?

WHITEHEAD: No.

QUESTION: [UNINTELLIGIBLE]

WHITEHEAD: I mean, one can speculate ... if this is sort of taking Hawaii out of having ... it is inward looking and would lessen Hawaii's role as the crossroads of the Pacific. But on the other hand, I haven't read anything that particularly says that's going with ... that's what—I mean, we're—we're still on this ill-defined basis of what would ... what would a new kingdom look like.

[INDISTINCT CONVERSATION]

[GENERAL CONVERSATION]

[END]