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Spill the Humani-TEA:

Interview with Kealani Cook

By Team Wahine

Transcript of the Podcast

Introduction

Zandria: Aloha kakou, I'm Zandria,

Shauna: I'm Shauna,

Kori-Ann: I'm Kori-Ann,

Shauna: And we are Team Wahine. Here we have Kealani Cook, a professor at UH West Oahu for history in Hawaiian Pacific Studies. He is originally from Waimea on Hawaii Isle who got his master's in history at UH Manoa and proceeded to continue his education by earning a PhD in Michigan. His first book, which we will be discussing, is *Return to Kahiki* that was published in 2018. The book focuses on Native Hawaiian interactions with other Oceanic People.

Music…

Shauna: What made you go into history instead of the concentration of Hawaiian Pacific Studies?

Cook: I started off liking history and then it kind of fell into place. I went into history because it was something I have always liked. There was a lot of changes that happened in Hawaiian history, the Hawaiian historian that was at Manoa, Reynolds, she was sick for the longest time, so she really didn't take it on seriously when she teaches classes. There wasn't any Hawaiian history in the history department. All the Hawaiian history was being done in Pali side.

Actually, when I first started my PhD, I switched over and started doing Pacific history. I was up in Michigan to do my PhD and they were creating like a Pacific

history or a Pacific studies core group. There was a couple other people who were from Hawaii, some people who were from other parts of the Pacific, and some grad students they were bringing up. The faculty, they had a Samoan guy from New Zealand. He was the first Samoan Road Scholar. Road Scholar is basically one of those fancy British schools – can't remember if it was Oxford or Cambridge - where they pull someone from the former empire, and they have a full ride. So, he was up there and then there's this guy, Vince Diez, he's from Guam, but he went to Manoa. He was a walk-on on the football team and then he quit so he can focus on his studies. There was Amy Stillman, who's from the east side, she studies hula so she studied up there, and also Susan Agita, a local Japanese lady who does local literature.

So, they were all up there and had this sort of Pacific history thing that they're forming, and I kind of got sucked into it. And then I was there, I was reading all of this Pacific history stuff and I've seen all of these Hawaiians sprinkled around in Samoan and Fijian history and seeing Samoans and Fijians sprinkled around in Tahitian and Hawaiian history, so I started researching that sort of in between. Everyone seemed to be going back and forth in the Pacific, but no one was writing about it. Basically, I didn't want to write about it because I was scared about Hawaiian studies. It had such a negative sense of –

Zandria: It just seemed depressing.

Cook: Yeah! Literally, because the books that we read, the narrative is "Hawaiians, you've had this thing and you had the kingdom. You were almost good, modern subjects of the world and then you were unable to do it properly and we came over and took over." It was just super gross and biased.

Shauna: You've grown up in Waimea and a lot of Hawaiian culture and history flourished in Hawaii Isle.

Cook: Yeah when I was little, my grandpa used to take us to places all the time. I was a good student and in school, it told me that Hawaiian history was bad, so I stopped doing it. And looking back on it, I was like, "Wow, I shouldn't have been so easily led."

Music…

Zandria: Have you encountered a contact zone through your work? If so, what was it?

Cook: In Hawaiian history, a lot of historians were white, and a lot of contact zones they wanted to study was about "what happened when the white people showed up?" Histories in Hawaii always started with Captain Cook and no, histories of Hawaii shouldn't start halfway in the story. Because we focus so much on contact zones – the historians wouldn't usually use that term – but because we focus on those interactions, we only focused on that one type of interaction. Especially between Americans and Hawaiians, there's all this other stuff that's left out and the stuff I've been trying to do is connecting that.

The other one that's still not really done - is there's a lot of histories of Asians in Hawaii. There are histories of Japanese in Hawaii, Filipinos in Hawaii, histories based on Native Hawaiians, but nobody has been doing the actual interactions between Hawaiians and Asians in Hawaii. That history hasn't really been dug into and there's a lot of good stuff in there.

In the 1980s, they were full of all these histories in the Pacific, "what happened when the white people showed up?' and it's just over and over and over again. It's cool that you're actually analyzing something, but no one – because none of them were native or Asian – they didn't care about what happens when the natives and the Asians interact or what happens when the Samoans and Tahitians interact. That contact zone stuff, when you start talking about that, it's kind of coming from anthro and it's been ignored when it's not between white people and non-white people. Which means there's tons of stuff to study.

Music…

Kori-Ann: Can you give us a summary about your book, *Return to Kahiki*? In chapter five of your book, the title is "There is Nothing That Separates Us," can you explain further why you choose that title?

Cook: The book looks at three different projects that Hawaiians launched to make or shape relationships with other islanders. So, there's Native Hawaiians with

missionaries who go to the Marquesas and Micronesia in 1850 to 1904-ish. The second one is Kalakaua sending a diplomatic delegation to Samoa and eventually, it's supposed to go to Tonga to create an alliance between the three of them. They did that because when the empires are coming, they're aggressive and the idea is that we tangled them with diplomacy. If all three of us are tied together with diplomatic ties, it'll be harder for them to scavenge us piece by piece. And then the last one is John Baker, he's the guy in the front of the book. Originally, all the titles were really descriptive and when you switch it to from the book, you're supposed to have more eloquent titles. Also, he kind of says that a couple times, he says variations of "there's nothing between us." There's no separation from us. And it just fit that chapter because it's about how he's seeing all of these connections and all these ties. And he's not just seeing it, he's trying to tell his audience at home.

Shauna: How did the different islands connect with other oceanic people?

Cook: Do you mean the different islands in Hawaii? Or -

Shauna: Yes.

Cook: Oh, there's certain places on each island where the names reflect the rest of the Pacific. So there's different places that still entangles those connections, name wise. Big Island chiefs always had to trace their ancestry to Pili. So Pa'ao was a priest from somewhere in Kahiki that came up and brought up a bunch of different religious things. Then with Big Island chiefs, they had a bloodline because they screwed around too much with the maka'aina and then it goes back somewhere to Kahiki and comes back with Pili. So, Big Island chiefs would trace their ancestry to Pili. Oahu chiefs would trace their ancestry to La'amaikahiki, La'a from Kahiki. Kauai chiefs would sometimes trace their ancestry back Olopana and he has this sort of connection from Kahiki. Different islands, different chiefs would trace their lineage to heiaus that are associated with Kahiki.

Almost everywhere, there seems to be Raiatea, it was like a center near west of Tahiti. It was the center of navigation and there was a marae that was Taputapuatea. And one of those things from late migration, all of those people's languages are similar and they're similar to ours, there's usually a place called Taputapuatea or somewhat of a variation, so there's actually a Taputapuatea that was somewhere up by Kualoa.

Different islands would have their names tied to these places, somewhere on this island. Later on, you have Laie, this huge sort of non-Hawaiian islander population, that was like the center of 20th century connections. On every island, there's always Tahitians and Samoans all throughout the 19th century that will show up. Apparently, there was Samoan ministers who were in Waimea at one point and Tahitian ministers all across 1830s-1850s… so every island had connections to somewhere.

Shauna: Yeah, that's cool. Every island has connections to the ocean, to the people. So, what do you hope for others to learn and to take away from reading your book?

Cook: If they can walk away from chapter five then I'm happy. It has always been the sense that there have been these historical connections and that they are always accessible. Even though there's no connection, if you look at these other places, Hawaiians are the exception in the American empire. We are the weird thing in the American empire. We're a farmer kingdom and all the Hawaiians ideas don't fit into capitalism. We're bad at a lot of things in making a proper America. But if you look at us with the Pacific, then it's *oh!* The things that make us weird and exceptional are actually that we're stuck with America and we kind of act American. Us, America Samoa, and Guam, we're the weirdos because we've been so sucked into that empire verses a lot of things that we're told are the abnormal things: the language, the hula, the sense of hospitality. They are the things that make us part of the Pacific and makes sense of being part of the Pacific.

Shauna: Thank you so much!

Zandria/ Kori-Ann: Thank you!

Cook: Thank you for doing this, ladies.

Conclusion

Zandria: Kealani Cook's research and his book *Return to Kahiki* provides some fresh insight on the intertwined history between the nations of oceania.

Shauna: His effort is one of many to help others to understand the history of kanaka maoli in the Pacific along with letting their voices being known and heard.

Zandria: Thank you for being with us, this was our *Interview with Kealani Cook*. Again, we are Team Wahine!

All: Aloha!