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# Thwarting Ambitions: The Rhetoric of Vocational Education in Depression-Era Hawai‘i

By Alan Rosenfeld

In the early months of 1931 the tight-knit circle of sugar barons that dominated the economy and politics of the Territory of Hawai‘i stood at a crossroads in the midst of the financial upheaval of the Great Depression. The drastic economic collapse that followed closely on the heels of a massive ten-year expansion of secondary education left the territorial government facing a financial liability that leading members of Hawaii’s planter class deeply resented. While King Sugar was eventually safeguarded through the provision of federal subsidies beginning in 1934 as part of a national quota system, sugar prices and revenues in the first years of the Depression plummeted even as production remained constant (Lynsky 1938). By 1932, net sugar income would be roughly one-ninth of what the islands had witnessed just four years prior. The pineapple industry, meanwhile, lay in total ruins as production dropped 60 percent in a single year, leading to Castle and Cooke’s takeover of Dole Pineapple late in 1932. Coffee production also tumbled, declining nearly 49 percent over a four-year period (D. Crawford 1937). For Hawaii’s agrarian economy, these developments portended a financial disaster and sent the islands’ oligarchs into a panic as they scrambled to institute stopgap emergency measures, slashing public expenditures on education and shipping thousands of immigrant farm laborers back to the Philippines (MacLennan 2014).

Whereas secondary education had expanded vigorously in the 1920s, by the early 1930s Hawaii’s planter class began to view it as a liability. Not only did expenditures on public education constitute as much as 40 percent of the entire territorial budget (D. Crawford 1933), but public education, and secondary education in particular, carried with it the potential for social mobility and thus also the erosion of lines of demarcation between haole elites and the islands’ nonwhite majority. The drive for vocational education, which had been gathering momentum across the territory and nation for a decade, thus acquired a new sense of import and political relevance during the years of economic upheaval. Planters turned to a (gendered) vocational education curriculum as a means of recouping their public “investment”

through the cultivation of a citizen labor force comprising the children of Asian—primarily Japanese and Filipino—immigrants. While the planters’ rhetoric stressed respect for manual labor, Hawaii’s vocational education movement also entailed the enactment of measures to restrict the matriculation of plantation children at public high schools and the University of Hawai‘i (UH). This was the context in which Governor Lawrence M. Judd’s Advisory Committee on Education recommended adopting measures that would thwart the “ambitions and aspirations” of public school students that were “predestined to frustration” (Governor’s Advisory Committee on Education 1931:4).

Hawai‘i’s territorial economy was dominated by a collection of companies known as the Big Five, which were in turn largely controlled by a handful of close-knit families. While the sugar industry formed the backbone of Hawai‘i’s agrarian economy and the Big Five’s revenue streams, these companies exerted far more influence through a system of “interlocking directorates,” controlling nearly all of the vital industries in the territory: banking, insurance, retailing, and transportation (Tamura 1996:433). Not limited to the financial realm, the reach of the Big Five also extended into the media, utilities, education, the territorial legislature, and the judiciary. This overwhelmingly haole oligarchy of sugar planters thus had the ability to divert the public water supply for its own financial benefit, regulate the flow of immigration, and even summon police forces to suppress labor activity. Nevertheless, the oligarchs’ grip on power could only be sustained through hegemonic structures and practices, namely the willingness of portions of Hawai‘i’s nonwhite majority to accept such an inequitable sociopolitical system. It is here that public education loomed particularly large.

## Educational Discourse in Depression-Era Hawai‘i

At the time of the Great Depression, the discourse surrounding public education in Hawai‘i was primarily centered around two competing frameworks espoused by haole elites—paternalistic benevolence and Americanization. Many oligarchs propagated a paternalistic model in which public education constituted a benevolent gift of the ruling class that should be used to maintain the territory’s socioethnic hierarchy and sustain the Big Five’s revenue streams. Others, including voices from

Washington, DC, viewed public education in the Territory of Hawai‘i first and foremost as a mechanism for Americanization of the islands’ “Oriental” populace. While the drive for statehood and the islands’ pivotal role in World War II would eventually ensure the triumph of the latter agenda, such a path was not particularly evident looking forward from the years of the depression. For the purposes of this essay, it is also important to note what these two frameworks had in common—the foregrounding of relations between haole elites and Asian immigrants as a rhetorical binary. Whether the impetus was on enclosing Asian immigrants and their children within the plantation community or transforming them into “proper” Americans worthy of citizenship and statehood, the framing of the debate in these terms worked to silence Native Hawaiian voices and preclude recognition of Hawaiian claims to sovereignty and control of the islands’ present and future.

Far from marking a straightforward victory of the values of democracy and equal opportunity, the massive expansion of secondary education in Hawai‘i during the 1920s was fraught with contradiction and hypocrisy. A 1920 federal survey conducted by the US Bureau of Education helped catalyze change by delivering a scathing review of the scope and quality of public education in the territory. The study noted that the proportion of high school students in Hawai‘i was the lowest in the nation, while also criticizing the territory’s inadequate level of funding per pupil and admonishing the supposed insufficient command of standard English found among students and teachers alike (Bureau of Education 1920). At the same time, the federal observers claimed that the islands’ immigrants came from the “humblest and most ignorant classes in their home countries” and prescribed for the children of these immigrants a vocational curriculum centered on farming and manual labor (Bureau of Education 1920:37). The survey also attacked the highly enrolled Japanese language schools as “un-American,” thereby providing the planter class with justification for increased regulations and surveillance in the years that followed (Asato 2008:81).

Nobody typified Hawai‘i’s new approach toward public education in the 1920s more than territorial governor Wallace Farrington (1921-1929), who presided over an astonishing increase in secondary school enrollment. While just 2 percent of the territory’s youth attended high school in 1920, that figure had increased to nearly 50 percent by 1930 (Hyams 1985). An ardent proponent of Americanization, Farrington welcomed this development along with the requisite opening of new high schools to accommodate such significant growth. Believing that the Hawaiian Islands must

become “American without question,” (Farrington 1932:10) Farrington argued that graduates of the territory’s public schools would provide a “bulwark of support to completely Americanize Hawai‘i (Farrington 1932:15). The governor’s approach to Americanization, however, depended on the erasure of the Native Hawaiian and Asian immigrant cultures, with Farrington going so far as to claim that “the original 13 colonies had more differences to the square inch than we have in the whole territory” (Farrington 1932:12).

While viewing himself as a reformer, Farrington reinscribed the islands’ ethnic hierarchy by caving in to calls from Hawai‘i’s expanding white middle class for the establishment of English Standard schools. Although English had been the language of instruction for classrooms in Hawai‘i since 1896, proponents of Americanization opined about the prevalence of pidgin and Hawai‘i Creole English (HCE) in public school classrooms, claims that the 1920 federal survey appeared to validate. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) thus began to officially designate English Standard schools at the elementary, intermediate, and high school levels, with the understanding that the use of pidgin or HCE would not be tolerated. In communities where separate English Standard schools were unavailable, special class sections were created (Hughes 1993). Leading educators such as UH president David Crawford supported the English Standard system for eliminating the ostensible “handicap that public school instruction in Hawai‘i presented to “children who do come from English-speaking homes” (D. Crawford 1933:214). However, in practice, the English Standard movement “resulted in de facto segregation by class and race, with white middle-class children flocking to English Standard schools (Tamura 1996:436). In the mid-1920s, the DPI, in collaboration with the Territorial Normal and Training School, instituted oral examinations of teacher candidates to ensure their proficiency in standard English as well as their embrace of “American middle-class values” (Potter and Logan 1995:160).

The intense level of centralization of the territory’s public schools facilitated the drive to Americanize as well as the launch of the English Standard system. Hawai‘i’s public schools were unique in the sense that they operated without any input or direction from local school boards. Instead, power rested in the hands of the territorial governor and his appointed officials—the six DPI commissioners and the superintendent of public instruction, who thus became the supervisors of the largest component of the territorial government, complete with 2,500 employees (Governor’s

Advisory Committee on Education 1931). Predictably, these seven appointees almost always emanated from the tight-knit circle of oligarchs that ran the territory's Big Five companies. The superintendent and commissioners were in turn invested with the authority to hire and distribute teachers and principals throughout the territory as they saw fit, devise a standard teacher training program, and select course textbooks for Hawaii's schools (Hyams 1985). It should therefore come as no surprise that the DPI became *the* primary mechanism for Americanization of the Hawaiian Islands, an identity that the institution willingly embraced.

Hawaii's English Standard movement was at once an extension of broader post-World War I nativist sentiment at the national level as well as a response to the islands' unique sociocultural features. The paucity of white children in the public school system made Hawai'i distinct, as they accounted for only 10 percent of total enrollment as of 1929 (Potter and Logan 1995). Anti-Japanese sentiment within the haole community ran high, at a time when the majority of the public-school student body consisted of ethnic Japanese children, 98 percent of whom also attended Japanese language schools in the afternoon (Asato 2003). The 1920 federal survey could only have served to stoke those fears by recommending the abolishment of Japanese schools and predicting that the presence of Japanese as a portion of the territory's electorate would drastically increase from 1.4 percent to 53.1 percent between the years 1918 and 1940 (Bureau of Education 1920). Finally, memories of the 1920 strikes, in which 77 percent of O'ahu's labor force participated and which featured active collaboration between the territory's Japanese and Filipino communities, cast a long shadow across race relations throughout the remainder of the decade. The 1928 kidnapping and murder of the ten-year-old son of a prominent haole banker by Japanese American Myles Fukunaga, followed by the 1932 abduction and murder of falsely accused Native Hawaiian rape defendant Joseph Kahahawai at the hands of family members of the alleged victim, a white female, only exacerbated the undercurrents of resentment.

Fascinatingly, Hawaii's image as a progressive "melting pot" emerged at this very moment of bitter racial conflict. Romanzo Adams was the most prominent of a handful of UH sociologists who developed and propagated the territory's image as an idyllic "racial melting pot" during the 1920s and 1930s (Saranillio 2018:81). While this might initially appear as a historical paradox, one must recognize that the espousal of the "melting pot" theory provided Hawai'i's haole elite with the perfect hegemonic

tool for rhetorically defusing ethnic tensions (while also facilitating tourism and the campaign for statehood). Writing in 1938, Andrew Lind—another UH sociologist and one who would become a dedicated ally of Japanese Americans during the war—asserted that the “racial etiquette of Hawai‘i... does not permit public approval of racial discrimination... [requiring it to be diverted] into less direct channels of expression.” While Lind observed a rise in the level of resentment against Asians entering the “urban trades and professions” as well as the existence of what he termed a “color bar” in the islands, boundaries of exclusion were not drawn through overtly discriminatory legislation but rather via covert and “informal understandings” (Lind 1938:272—273). The lens Lind offers allows us to decode the racialized discourse surrounding vocational education in depression-era Hawai‘i.

This rhetorical convention was keenly at work in the writings of UH president David Crawford in a 1933 text that called for a radical restructuring of secondary and higher education in the territory. In the book, *Paradox in Hawai‘i: An Examination of Industry and Education and the Paradox They Represent*, Crawford advocated for the implementation of a two-tiered secondary school system that would preclude those of “a somewhat mediocre capacity for mental development” from obtaining a college education (1933:249). Despite the ongoing expansion of the two-tiered English Standard system, Crawford proudly asserted that the public schools of Hawai‘i were completely devoid of “race lines” and that instead, an “atmosphere of interracial friendliness” prevailed in the schools (1933:196-197). At the same time, however, Crawford presented the “rapidly increasing numbers of Oriental youth” (1933:202) in Hawai‘i’s public schools over the prior 30 years as a “very serious problem” (1933:201-202), a “liability,” and even a “menace” to society (1933:217). Clearly, Crawford’s calls, in the same publication, for the establishment of “a new set of secondary schools” focusing on “productive work” (1933:250) and featuring the half-time employment of male and female students in industry were targeted toward this group of “Oriental youth” (1933:253). It is only through his implicit elevation of white middle-class culture as the lone acceptable standard against which all others are measured that Crawford was able to proclaim the absence of racism in the territory’s public schools. Calling America a “fabled land of golden opportunity,” the UH president projected his own prejudices onto Hawai‘i’s employers, whom he claimed would provoke “disillusionment” (1933:232) in ambitious youth by informing them that “Orientals are not wanted” in white-collar professions (1933:231).

DPI superintendent Will C. Crawford, appointed by Governor Farrington in 1925, shared his namesake's vision for a bifurcated public education system, largely divided along implicit lines of race and ethnicity. Students of Japanese ancestry had come to compose the majority of Hawai'i's entire public education enrollment but were "dramatically underrepresented" in the haole-dominated English Standard schools (Odo 2004:63). Superintendent Crawford informed a group of Asian immigrants attending the annual Conference on New Americans there is a "danger" presented when "the majority of Japanese parents today... push their children through all of the schools—elementary, high school and university" (Okihiro 1992:144). Crawford told the parents assembled that "vocational education" offered a solution by steering the "child of inferior ability" into a more suitable occupation (Okihiro 1992:144). Writing in the *Hawaii Educational Review* in 1931, the superintendent encouraged teachers to provide public school students with "sympathetic and careful vocational guidance," a euphemistic directive instructing the territory's educators to thwart the ambitions of children of Asian descent. He wrote:

*It is not strange that our young people...should be encouraged to seek better employment than they themselves enjoyed. While this ambition [for a better life] on the part of both parents and children is natural and right, it should be kept within the realm of actual possibilities... Each child should be helped to accomplish his best, but it is not wise to encourage him beyond his capabilities. (W. Crawford 1931:177)*

Here Crawford expressed a sense of alleged inevitability that provided one of the crucial ideological underpinnings of Hawai'i's vocational education movement. The ostensible permanence of Hawai'i's occupational ceiling, coded as deriving from ability rather than race, was offered as a justification for discouraging students' aspirations for greatness.

## Education in the Crosshairs of Economic Crisis

The intensity of the Great Depression produced a dramatic shift in the planters' relationship to their labor supply. Although wages on Hawai'i's plantations ranked among the highest in the nation (Whitehead 1999), the planters had consistently repressed the activities of organized labor. Labor shortages were typically

a greater concern for Hawai'i's employers than joblessness, but unemployment soared from just 3.2 percent in 1929 to 24.9 percent in 1933, when one includes those employed on federal relief projects (Schmitt 1976:90). By the time of the Depression, Filipinos had come to form nearly 70 percent of the agricultural workforce (Whitehead 1999), with the majority of the territory's entire Filipino population working and residing on Hawaii's plantations (Kerkvliet 2002). The Big Five's control over this flexible pool of laborers, many of whom were ineligible for US citizenship, allowed these companies to release pressure for employment through repatriation. Following the collapse of the pineapple industry, the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association, which operated as an extension of the Big Five, discontinued its decades-long program of Filipino recruitment and sent 7,200 immigrant laborers back to the Philippines the following year (Kerkvliet 2002). Despite these convenient cost-cutting measures, the profits of Big Five company Alexander and Baldwin bottomed out in 1932 at just \$864,375 (Dean 1950).

The massive economic downturn presented a clear crisis for Hawaii's ruling elites, who generally viewed public education, which constituted the largest segment of territorial expenditures, as a product of their own benevolence. Within a month of the 1929 stock market crash, Governor Judd had already announced the formation of the special Advisory Committee on Education, whose roster contained a bounty of the territory's most prominent oligarchs: Frank C. Atherton, George M. Collins, Richard A. Cooke, Arthur L. Dean, Walter F. Dillingham, James Dole, Ernest W. Greene, and Lorrin A. Thurston. Although the committee included educators such as Romanzo Adams and McKinley High School principal Miles Cary, their voices would inevitably be drowned out by those representing the islands' most powerful business interests. This point was certainly not lost on the editors of the Japanese-language newspaper *Hawaii Hochi*, who derisively referred to the constellation of Judd's committee as the "Jim Crow Commission" (Morgan 2018:106). In a feeble attempt at maintaining some semblance of checks and balances, Judd also enlisted the assistance of Charles A. Prosser, the director of a Minnesota technical school and a nationally recognized proponent of vocational education, to conduct a companion investigation. Prosser's salary was conveniently covered by the Chamber of Commerce (Tamura 1993). The outcome of the joint report was apparent from the outset.

Prosser and the advisory committee recommended a massive overhaul of public education that would roll back the progress of the 1920s in the name of fiscal

austerity and strive for the “coordination of the schools with industry” (Governor’s Advisory Committee on Education 1931:4). The explicitness of the claims contained in the report belied the euphemistic nature of the term coordination,” with the advisory committee calling for the “enthusiastic cooperation between the schools and employers,” arguing that it was “wasteful to train young people for already overcrowded occupations” (Governor’s Advisory Committee on Education 1931:12-13). The committee’s recommendations featured the merger of the Territorial Normal School with the UH Teachers College, the institution of caps on both high school and university enrollments, and the expansion of vocational curricula. Amazingly, the territory’s response seemed to even exceed the severity of the recommendations. The merger resulted in the displacement of half of the Teachers College faculty along with a 60 percent reduction in budget (Kamins and Potter 1998). Meanwhile, the board of education enacted drastic budget cuts of \$2.5 million—effective for the 1932-1933 school year—and agreed to eliminate 400 teaching positions (Tamura 1993). The University of Hawai‘i first charged tuition in 1930, with that figure tripling by 1933, while the legislature cut appropriations to UH by 20 percent (Kamins and Potter 1998). The legislature’s desire to shift the costs of public education onto individual students and their families was echoed in its new approach toward secondary school policy, as laws passed in 1933 introduced tuition and book fees for those attending the territory’s public high schools (MacLennan 2014).

At a time when the number of Filipino males employed as laborers outnumbered those working as professionals by a ratio of 150:1 (Benham and Heck 1998), the message from Judd’s advisory committee was clear: public education would be used as a mechanism to maintain the islands’ ethno-socioeconomic structure and ensure that local-born Filipinos remained bounded within the plantations. With haole children making up less than 10 percent of the territory’s public school student body, the institution as a whole was already coded in the planters’ imaginary as racially Other (Potter and Logan 1995). Although Prosser and the advisory committee typically eschewed overt references to race, their vision of Hawaii’s occupational hierarchy had a distinct ethnic component. Prosser, for example, recommended the implementation of English language exams as a requirement for admission into UH, arguing that higher education be reserved for “persons of outstanding ability and character so that the public funds contributed through taxes in one way or another will not be wasted on the mediocre” (Prosser 1931:48). Although he stopped short of tying mediocrity to ethnicity, Prosser went on later in his report to cite complaints about the “children of

Filipino immigrants causing] overcrowding in competition for urban clerical jobs” (Prosser 1931:95). Here Prosser mimicked the rhetorical slight of the planters, reifying the socioethnic occupational hierarchy by accepting the premise that the racial tensions originated from Filipinos’ desire to escape from the bounded community of the plantation.

## Talking around Race

The Depression-era oligarchs deployed a variety of rhetorical strategies that enabled them to talk “around” race. Taken together, these tropes amounted to an operational code through which the participants in this discourse were able to signal their sentiments, political positions, and visions for the future without violating the “racial etiquette of Hawaii” Seen in this context, the unfolding discussion of vocational education, focusing squarely on the territory’s public school system, constituted a single facet of a much broader contestation of socioethnic hierarchies in the 1930s. Three examples of talking around race that one finds in the case of vocational education include discussions of urban drift, misguided ambition, and the ostensible inevitability of career paths.

Hawaii’s industrial leaders repeatedly lamented the flight of plantation workers and their children to urban settings, where they could potentially compete with established (white) professionals for a limited supply of well-paying jobs. What is noteworthy is that, in the context of the Great Depression, the dominant narrative was not one of upward mobility or even assimilation but rather one of failure on the part of the territory’s public school system to properly contain this urban drift. Rural parents and teachers alike were accused of deliberately stoking an aversion to manual labor in plantation youth. Speaking to the Kauai Educational Society in 1932, former governor Wallace Farrington chided those who “would bring ruin and disaster to the life of a first-class agriculturalist for no other reason than their own personal aversion to manual labor in the open field” (Farrington 1932:7). This position echoed that of the advisory committee, which, one year earlier, had written:

*The Committee is of the opinion that at the present time a large number of students at the secondary schools are spending their time with little profit to themselves or to the community in attempting to do work ill- suited to them or in evading tasks that require hard work or continuous effort. (Governor’s Advisory Committee on Education 1931:3)*

The remedy to this alleged malady entailed the “proper cooperation between the rural school and industries [that] would check much of the drift of the rural youth to the cities” (Governor’s Advisory Committee on Education 1931:9). Sociologist Romanzo Adams had tracked the migration of Japanese from the plantations into skilled professions in the 1920s, and the planter class remained consumed by the fear of a similar pattern emerging among the Filipinos. Judd’s advisory committee insisted that plantation life offered “living conditions which are superior to any which a great majority of rural youth could hope to attain in the city,” adding that the continued out-migration “would only serve to complicate the existing urban situation” (Governor’s Advisory Committee on Education 1931:9).

In this context, the natural drive of plantation youth to use public secondary and higher education as vehicles to propel themselves into promising career paths that would allow them to achieve a higher standard of living than their parents was presented as a social danger. In the midst of the Great Depression, Big Five elites supported the reconfiguration of public education to actively suppress the career aspirations of plantation youth through what Teachers College dean Benjamin Wist would later refer to as the “pre-determination of adult vocational life” (1940:166). While refraining from explicit references to race, Judd’s advisory committee insisted that the ambitions of rural youth to ascend the occupational hierarchy had “no grounds” for being “realized in the future” (Governor’s Advisory Committee on Education 1931:3-4). Charles Prosser concurred in his joint report, going so far as to identify rural teachers’ encouragement of their students’ ambition as “the biggest problem” facing education in the territory. The vocational educational proponent lamented that the islands had unwisely “urged [their] children to strive for life work they probably, with sharply increasing percentages, will never be able to do” (Prosser 1931:89).

A narrative of inevitability underpinned the educational policies Hawaii’s planter elites pursued as well as the assertions they offered in support of such policies. Advisory committee member and Castle and Cooke president Frank Atherton made the following remarks at his 1932 speech to the Conference of New Americans:

*7 out of 10 of those in the schools today, if they earn an honest living, will have to work in one of these industries [sugar or pineapple], otherwise they are liable to become paupers, or turn to criminal pursuits. (Okibiro 1992:146)*

These comments conveyed a decidedly paternalistic attitude, with Atherton implying that the ability of public school graduates to cultivate a promising career path was dependent upon the benevolence of the islands' oligarchs. Atherton's remarks closely align with those of Judd's advisory committee, which one year prior had proclaimed that "To function as a member of a community a young man 'must perform such duties as fall to his lot'" (Governor's Advisory Committee on Education 1931:14). Aspirations for social mobility among rural youth were thereby branded as a selfish transgression of community norms and a stubborn refusal to accept allegedly impenetrable occupational ceilings.

## Cultivating a Citizen Labor Force

The Great Depression, while necessitating unenviable budgetary decisions, also offered Hawai'i's oligarchs the opportunity to redesign the structure and content of public school education to better suit their own needs. The rhetorical focus on fiscal austerity masked a seismic demographic and political shift that was unfolding, as the children of Asian immigrants grew from 12 percent to 41 percent of the islands' total labor force in the 1930s (Whitehead 1999). Writing in 1933, Romanzo Adams described the "supplanting of immigrant laborers by laborers who are native-born citizens... and who will be eligible to vote and hold office" as "the most important development [in Hawai'i] in half a century" (Adams 1933:36-37). The vocational education movement, with its focus on restoring the "lost" dignity of manual labor while servicing the needs of industry, offered the perfect hegemonic device to refashion education to meet evolving employer demands—one that, importantly, could enable the preservation of ethnic-based occupational hierarchies without explicit references to race. The hope was that the expansion of vocational education would provide Hawaii's sugar and pineapple plantations with a trained yet pliant citizen labor force in the decades ahead while at the same time preventing the flow of Japanese and Filipino Americans into urban white-collar jobs unofficially reserved for white residents.

Gendered divisions of labor were a hallmark of Hawai'i's vocational education project and the patriarchal future that (male) policy makers envisioned for the plantation communities. Dean Wist of the UH Teachers College, for example, asserted that "the best way to keep young men satisfied with rural life is to emphasize the proper training of the young woman" (Wist 1940:187). Farrington called for

school curricula to instill “habits of industry” in girls (Farrington 1932:8), who would one day grow into “homemakers” with the power to “decorate or destroy” a plantation home (1932:13). While vocational educational curricula would prepare rural boys for a career in paid plantation labor, girls would receive instruction in cooking, sewing, and laundering, in order to prepare for lives as homemakers or domestic servants. The latter was a central point driven home by Charles Prosser in his joint report, in which he called for “every girl” to receive “three years’ training in practical homemaking.” Prosser contended that the dearth of job opportunities in the island economy made it “obvious that homemaking training for the girl is the only solution to the economic problem as far as women are concerned” (Prosser 1931:61). While local elites talked around race, the Minnesotan Prosser violated the racial etiquette when he predicted that the female “American Filipino, a new strain of domestic worker... may someday dominate the field of domestic service” (1931:54). Finally, much like Wist, Prosser argued that the rural girl would be the “most important influence in keeping the boy contented and satisfied” (1931:62). In short, Hawai‘i’s vocational educational movement was inherently interlaced with efforts to confine women of color within the domestic sphere.

## Conclusion

Oppositional voices, while present, lacked the positionality or amplification to counterbalance the weight of Big Five interests. Principal Miles Cary, who served on the governor’s advisory board, was a progressive pedagogue who refused to implement the vocational education curriculum at McKinley High School (Okiihiro 1992), derisively referred to as “Tokyo High” because of its predominantly Japanese American student body. Elsie Wilcox, while traveling in the same privileged circles as the prominent male members of Judd’s committee, campaigned vigorously against the proposed cuts in territorial funding of public education and the planned elimination of 400 teaching positions. Nevertheless, she was a champion of the call for Americanization as articulated in the 1920 federal study of education in Hawai‘i (Gething 1982). Another source of criticism came from the Japanese newspaper *Hawaii Hochi*, which dismissed the planters’ promotion of vocational education as “propaganda” (Morgan 2018:104), while Cary murmured that “those in favorable positions are not interested in seeing their circle entered by young people of the immigrant labor class” (Gething 1982:192).

By the end of the decade, a compromise had been struck under the leadership of superintendent Oren Long (1933-1946), who would go on to become Hawai‘i’s territorial governor. Notably, the piece of legislation that imposed high school tuition fees was repealed in 1937 (Tamura 1993). Similarly, in 1935 the Department of Public Instruction eliminated a policy that had barred 20 percent of junior high school graduates from enrolling in senior high schools (Budnick 2005). Although vocational curricula remained in place, Long spearheaded the comprehensive expansion of access to secondary education in rural areas, arguing that this would, among other things, prevent the migration of youth to the city. Senior high schools were established in Waialua (1937), Waipahu (1938), and Kahuku (1939) and on Lana‘i (1938) and Moloka‘i (1939). Whereas the Territory of Hawai‘i had only four public high schools as late as 1920, by 1940 there were 23 such schools, which boasted a combined enrollment of 16,105 students (Stueber 1964:39).

Ironically, in a sense, it was the onset of World War II, accompanied by the wide-ranging militarization of the island territory, that ultimately precipitated the demise of the oligarchs’ stranglehold on power. The US military presence provided an abundance of employment opportunities beyond the purview of the Big Five conglomerates, produced a dramatic expansion of Hawai‘i’s white middle class, and accelerated the islands’ integration into the fabric of American life. The erosion of the planters’ thorough domination of the territory thus marked the triumph of many of their long-term political and economic objectives, including the dominance of white middle-class values, the growth of the tourism industry, and the steady drive toward statehood. Changing demographics and Hawai‘i’s Democratic Revolution of 1954, however, would certainly foretell the disintegration of the socioethnic occupational hierarchy that the islands’ vocational education movement was intended to preserve.

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