

# The Persistence of Plantation Paternalism

## Moving Image Representations of Agriculture on O‘ahu, Hawai‘i

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### Introduction and Background

Using moving images from the 1940s–60s, this Forum contribution examines the development of cultural representations of food systems in Hawai‘i, detailing a series of erasures enacted by promotional films from the pineapple and sugar industries of the 1940s and 1960s.

Approximately 85–90 percent of the food consumed in Hawai‘i is imported from the US mainland or farther afield. This is a far cry from traditional Native Hawaiian agriculture, which was based on a land stewardship system whereby there was/is no ownership of the land. The concept of *mālama ‘āina* (commonly referred to as caring for the land) actually reflects a deeper meaning, because *‘āina* isn’t just defined as land but rather as “that which feeds.” The notion that food and agriculture are integral to the well-being of people is integral to indigenous views of land stewardship. To this end, Native Hawaiians worked through an ingenious system of land divisions, or *ahupua‘a*—wedge-shaped sections of land that included mountains from which to gather/harvest wood for canoes and homes; freshwater streams; flat land for taro cultivation using stream water as irrigation in *lo‘i kalo* (irrigated taro fields); shallow reef areas for nearshore fishing; and access to the ocean for deep-sea fishing. Stewardship of these resources was ingrained in the Hawaiian culture through a series of *kapu*, or taboos, strictly dictating

certain seasons for cultivating, harvesting, and resting both the people and the land.

The Native Hawaiian food and watershed system fed from four hundred thousand to one million people, independent from any outside inputs until about fifty years after the arrival of Captain James Cook in 1778.<sup>1</sup> After this period, and with the support of American business interests,<sup>2</sup> the Māhele of 1848 took place, dividing all of the lands in Hawai‘i and rezoning them into three categories: Crown lands (about 23 percent); *konohiki* lands, to be divided among 245 chiefs (40 percent); and government lands, to be awarded to commoners who worked the land as active tenants (37 percent).<sup>3</sup> With the subsequent Kuleana Act of 1850, a great theft of land from Native Hawaiians occurred because the law facilitated the consolidation of land into large congruent tracts ripe for plantation owners to take advantage of cheap imported Asian labor.<sup>4</sup> Large plantations provided economies of scale for capital investments, the funding for which only wealthy landowners could afford.

Owing to a lack of understanding of the process for petitioning for ownership of the land, eligible commoners, or *maka‘āinana*, were not able to claim their land titles. The law was purposely written to make the procedures onerous to prevent claimants from pursuing their appeals for fee simple ownership. After the Māhele and the Kuleana Act eased the way, the plantations became larger and larger, importing thousands of laborers from a variety of Asian countries to do the hard labor of growing and processing sugarcane and pineapple.<sup>5</sup> Both territorial and state government in Hawai‘i gave legislative and material support to the plantation system to foster its continued growth and development. However, as a result of globalization, cheaper labor available in developing countries, and other factors, most plantations closed in the 1990s, leaving large swaths of land fallow on all the islands. This land remains idle and is now ripe for development. Focusing on media representations of plantation life and labor

demonstrates how the plantation system continues to influence agricultural and land policy during a critical juncture in Hawai‘i’s land use history. The state can continue to support large landowners through legislative policy, or it can pivot toward a new narrative that encourages less dependence on imported foods and more promotion of smaller-scale farming operations, with a variety of sustainable models and distinct emphases.

## “The Story of Sugar Is Really the Story of Hawaii”: Moving Image Literature

The strategic erasures enacted by promotional films from the pineapple and sugar industries of the 1940s and 1960s are resurging now in corporate publicity campaigns, for example, by Monsanto and Pioneer Hi-Bred Corporations. There is continuity between mid-twentieth-century and current agribusiness propaganda highlighting the legacies of plantation towns; the self-projected images of the benevolent, paternalistic corporations; and workers’ strikes against their own exploitation. Industry representations define the colonial plantation context as the dominant agricultural history of Hawai‘i, advertising its accomplishments through educational films shown in schools at all grade levels. The plantations as a collective industry engaged in cultural production of knowledge to foster public goodwill for plantation economy and promote a corporate worldview of industrial monocropping agriculture.<sup>6</sup> These sponsored films, also called “industrial” or “institutional,” were produced to win the hearts and minds of the viewers, in this case from an early age, since a majority of them were aimed at elementary and/or high school children.<sup>7</sup> Solbrig argues that these types of films were constructed to be “ideologically informed arguments about the social world” regardless of the industry they were supporting.<sup>8</sup> In terms of the time period in which these films were produced and distributed, they walk a fine line between simply outdated and culturally, historically, and politically significant. However, they

are an important part of the visual record of social, political, and cultural life for future generations.<sup>9</sup> Insofar as archival footage does not represent a neutral view, knowing that the films were produced to be shown in schools identifies them as propaganda for the plantation industry, designed to maintain the status quo of a supportive government and an oppressive system that not only subjugated the people but contributed to extensive environmental degradation as well.

Pineapple and sugar industrial films portray plantations and agricultural fields as sources of jobs and identity creation in Hawai‘i, eliding the subordination of plantation laborers and the erasure of *kanaka maoli* knowledge of tropical agriculture. They celebrate the paternalistic plantation system and completely erase Native Hawaiian history. Analogous to tobacco industrial films, the imagery was meant to portray an idyllic view of colonial settler agriculture to be cherished and protected rather than questioned and critiqued for its negative social, political, and environmental ramifications.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, Grieveson argues that industrial films create “a visual pedagogy for instructing audiences in the new ways of mass production and in the corresponding political economy of advanced capitalism,” creating yet another parallel between these two “souths.”<sup>11</sup> These films created a narrative promoting the plantation system, meant to highlight its benefits both to the state and to its population within a system that enabled corporate plantation owners to exploit workers and encourage the laborers to remain complacent.

Hawai‘i’s industrial films bring the toil and hard labor of plantations into the public sphere, but they do so in a “whitewashed” (using the word advisedly in the Hawai‘i context) format using appealingly tropical aesthetics to convey the message of benevolence, technological progress, and innovation, all the while erasing not only *kanaka maoli* agricultural practices but the labor-intensive and exploitative plantation system of importing Asian immigrants to work the

sugarcane and pineapple crops in difficult conditions. This labor is essentially erased. This message also obliterates any opposition to the system. Not only was there documented evidence of *kanaka maoli* resistance but there was also resistance from plantation laborers to low pay and harsh working conditions through general strikes starting in 1909 all the way through 1924.<sup>12</sup> While the industrial films avoid any mention of this resistance for obvious reasons, it is important to mention that, as with other places where colonization occurred, neither the colonizing nor the propaganda machines operated evenly or without pushback from the subalterns.<sup>13</sup> These films completely ignore any solidarity in resistance. The plantation owners' narrative was primary, and any resistance narratives were hidden for almost a century.

Analyzing moving images in this case enables us to understand the representation of plantation life as “benevolent” and an economic driver for the state of Hawai‘i. It also is a basis from which to argue for changes to reflect sustainable values based on ecologically and sociopolitically just principles, given that these cultural representations are not based in current, or even past, realities.<sup>14</sup> The moving image narratives visualize how advertising and public relations promote plantation life and agriculture, push for recognition of the allegedly positive economic impact of pineapple and sugar industries, and attempt to counter negative perceptions of the plantation associations. The moving images argue for the benefits of large-plantation/corporate-owned industrial agriculture.

This visual history exemplifies the narrative behind Hawai‘i’s inability to enact policies that depart from this particularly narrow and utterly romanticized account of the past. The economic impact of the plantations in Hawai‘i cannot be overstated. These films promoted the view that the contribution of the sugar and pineapple economies brought Hawai‘i into the “modern” world, defined as having all of the conveniences that could be found on the continent.

For example, *Na Ailana Kopaa O Hawaii: Sugar Islands of Hawaii* (Yosh Matsuoka and Bill Miller, 1949) provides some context: “About 14,000 persons are employed the year round, and more than 50,000 people depend on sugar indirectly for their livelihood.” Given that Hawai‘i’s 1960 population estimate was 632,000 people,<sup>15</sup> almost 8 percent were dependent on the sugar industry alone, without including any pineapple plantation production.

## Methods

The Henry Ku‘ualoha Giugni Moving Image Archive of Hawai‘i, also called ‘Ulu‘ulu, is located on the University of Hawai‘i–West O‘ahu campus. It is dedicated to preserving and perpetuating the rich history of moving images in Hawai‘i and facilitates social discourse. Its website states,

‘Ulu‘ulu aims to perpetuate and share the rich moving image heritage of Hawai‘i through the preservation of film and videotape related to the history and culture of Native Hawaiians and the people of Hawai‘i. ‘Ulu‘ulu is a Hawaiian word meaning collections, assembly, or gathering. [The] archive is not just a collection of moving image items, but also an assembly of voices, communities, and stories; a gathering place for people to share Hawai‘i’s culture, traditions and collective memory.<sup>16</sup>

The archive’s location and emphases make it crucial for preserving moving images of cultural change.

It is commonplace to argue that we are being overwhelmed by too many images in our daily lives. Indeed, Marianna Torgovnick states that “we live in an age of what the French theorist Jacques Derrida called ‘le mal d’archive’ [archive fever] and defined in two competing senses: a passion and hunger for archives and a feeling of discomfort and even dread associated with them as memento mori.”<sup>17</sup> While Gracy argues that this could be construed as democratizing access to visual images, Sheldon argues that archives continue to have a role to play even with the advent of cloud-based film and video storage through the recognition of value in certain works.<sup>18</sup> The process of curating moving images in an era when the amount of footage

could potentially inundate us with its sheer presence is key to making the distinction between random selfie videos and footage of historical value.

The industrial films from the 1940s and 1960s analyzed within the context of this article were uncovered by the archivists at the ‘Ulu‘ulu archive<sup>19</sup> as part of a project focused on competing views of the use of moving images. Of the ten films available for viewing on their website, six were pertinent for this project. They were transcribed for relevant content in both narrative and visual forms. The films were shot on 16mm and ranged from eleven to thirty-four minutes, and they were produced by the Pineapple Growers’ Association of Hawaii and the Hawaii Sugar Planters’ Association between the 1940s and 1960s. The six films were *Pineapple Growing in Hawaii* (Francis Haar and Joyce Roberts, after 1959), *Pineapple Country, Hawaii: A Story of the Fruit of Research* (Francis Haar and Joyce Roberts), *Na Ailana Kopaa O Hawaii: Sugar Islands of Hawaii, Hawaii: Paradise Plus* (1948), *Waipahu Sugar Plantation #1* (Alan Amos Collection), and *Waipahu Sugar Plantation #2* (Alan Amos Collection). The last two films are silent, and while they do provide some visual reference of plantation life in an almost voyeuristic manner, they are not as useful for the purposes of this article as the first four. These films are part of the Alan Amos Collection at the ‘Ulu‘ulu Archive. Amos is an independent producer who lived and worked in Waipahu. When the sugar plantations started closing down, he wanted to record and document the daily operations of a sugarcane plantation. He set up a camera on the side of a field and recorded plantation laborers at work, specialized heavy machinery cutting and moving sugarcane, and finally, in one of the films, he recorded a cane fire, the process that was used to rid the cane stalks of leaves. These large fires were common in many areas of the islands, with ashes flying on the trade winds for many miles and scattering over the landscape, landing on top of houses and businesses and obscuring traffic on roads.

*Pineapple Growing in Hawaii, Pineapple Country, Hawaii, Na Ailana Kopaa O Hawaii,* and *Hawaii: Paradise Plus* were donated to the archive by the Daniel K. Inouye Congressional Collection. They were part of the late senator's papers and films located in his Hawai'i congressional office. The 'Ulu'ulu Archive acquired the collection in 2013 after Senator Inouye's passing in 2012. The University of Hawai'i at Mānoa received his papers, and the University of Hawai'i–West O'ahu received the films for its archive. There is a separate agreement with the Library of Congress to share the documents digitally with researchers interested in the material as well. According to Janel Quirante, head archivist at 'Ulu'ulu, they "assume that [Senator Inouye] used the films to promote the idea of agriculture in Hawai'i in order to market Hawai'i to the rest of the country as a place of business and industry."<sup>20</sup> These films would have been a way to highlight to his congressional colleagues that Hawai'i was not a backwater state and that industrial agriculture was a thriving business opportunity worthy of support with federal dollars. The late senator used these films to "sell" Hawai'i as attractive to business. As agriculture started to wane in the state, tourism replaced it as the single largest industry to the detriment of the overall health of the economy due to an overreliance on one industry. The pendulum now seems to be swinging (very slowly) in another direction, but questions remain as to whether large corporate agriculture will step in alongside tourism or whether there will be opportunities for sustainable agriculture to get its own market share.

The films are available for researchers online without University of Hawai'i affiliation, and access requires only a short registration process. New documentary filmmakers also constitute a large share of 'Ulu'ulu's users. They can request film clips to use in their contemporary films. The archive does not own the copyright to the footage, but its employees assist filmmakers and researchers in making permission requests to the original owners.



To assess the efficacy of the films in their intended political context as a part of Senator Inouye's collection, narrative analyses of voice-overs and imagery were conducted to research the films' propagandist views of the sugar and pineapple industries and how they represented their role in Hawai'i's history and economy. We'll see that the films were designed to construct a narrative of a hegemonic system to maintain its dominance and erase any other iterations of viable agricultural systems.

## Moving Image Representations of Hawai'i's Industrial Agriculture

However distinctive, the mid-century and contemporary films share a vision that science and industry represent forward progress for Hawai'i agriculture and that nature should not and cannot be left to its own devices to produce enough for consumption and/or export in the amount needed to make a profit. While the narration is clear in providing the viewer information about the various scientific advances made through research paid for by the Pineapple Research Institute, the Hawaii Sugar Planters' Association (HSPA), and Monsanto Corporation, the visual cues afforded by the films convey other messages. In both *Pineapple Growing in Hawaii* and *Pineapple Country, Hawaii: A Story of the Fruit of Research*, most of the shots of research being conducted occur in a laboratory setting, and the scientists are almost all Caucasian/Euro-American. There are some shots of field experiments, especially spraying pesticides to treat mealy bugs, but any discussion of the potential problems of pesticide application is avoided. The application of increasingly potent and "better" chemicals is discussed as being the fruit of research, as is the design of specialized equipment to combat certain soil bacteria. The narration asserts that there are other destructive pests within the soil for pineapples. It goes on to state, "The controls of nature are not enough, and the biologist turns again to the chemist to rid the soil

of nematodes, for chemicals that will fumigate the land and make it clean for pineapple growth.” In fact, Hawai‘i’s agricultural system is still reeling from these repeated chemical interventions into the soil.

In addition to the narrative of sugar and pineapple being promoted as the focal point of the Hawaiian economy, the industrial films also demonstrate a commitment to the representation of masculinity. Men are depicted as “managers of nature” harnessing science and mechanical power to dominate the feminine land.<sup>21</sup> In one segment of *Pineapple Country, Hawaii: A Story of the Fruit of Research*, the voice-over states, “For two years, the plants have been under constant watch and care—cared for scientifically and protected from the *hazards of nature* by the knowledge of man. Here now is the fruit of mass production and individual attention; both the results of research. Harvested pineapple is at the peak of its ripeness due to the *knowledge of man*” (emphasis added). The dominion of man over nature is touted as contributing to a better, and, in one case, an even more healthful product. The scientists and plantation managers are represented as wise men, whereas the plantation laborers are seen as subhuman and not worthy of individual attention, if they are present in the films at all (Figure 1).

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Figure 1. One of the early shots in *The Story of Pineapple* reveals a “local” barefoot boy enjoying a pineapple in the field. The difficult labor leading to the harvest of the pineapple is glossed over and ignored. Frame enlargement. Courtesy of the ‘Ulu‘ulu Henry K. Giugni Moving Image Archive, University of Hawai‘i–West O‘ahu, Daniel K. Inouye Collection.

They are represented as an indistinguishable mass of labor(ers) rather than as individual workers contributing to the growth of sugar and pineapple in Hawai‘i. The last voice-over states, “This is the fruit of research—seventy thousand acres of pineapples where once there were none. Gainful work for eight thousand men year-round and twenty-four thousand at the peak of the harvest,” all due to the magnanimity of the plantation system. Women’s labor is erased, while the

scientists' ingenuity is celebrated. The image accompanying the voice-over highlights the role of machines on the plantations. The hard labor of the plantation and cannery workers, many of them women, is completely overlooked. The film content exemplifies the micropolitics of how the bodies represented in the films interact in those spaces and how those spatial politics involve racialized and classed subjects.

Another plot development in the story of pineapple concerns the crossbreeding of the Hawaiian pineapple with wild South American varieties to strengthen the hybrid plants so that they can inherently withstand assaults from pests and other plant stressors. What could only be described as the "intrepid explorers" are pictured as bringing back indigenous varieties of pineapple from South America to harvest seeds in order to further their research and increase their profits. No credit is given to the people from whom the indigenous pineapples are taken, and their contributions as faceless "South Americans" are glossed over as well. This is akin to the theft of "land races" of corn from indigenous peoples in Mexico to develop genetically modified organisms.<sup>22</sup> This pattern is repeated throughout all six films. Recognition is given to modern industrial agriculture, while the contributions of indigenous peoples to the food system are ignored or glossed over. They further the colonial project by erasing the meaningful participation in the agricultural system in Hawai'i by the *kanaka maoli*.

*Na Ailana Kopaa O Hawaii: Sugar Islands of Hawaii* and *Hawaii: Paradise Plus*, the two films focused on the sugar industry's impact on Hawai'i's economy, emphasize even more the narrative of the industry's munificence (Figure 2). The voice-over in *Na Ailana* provides a short history of Hawai'i and sets the stage for the plantation system's magnanimity. It describes Nu'uuanu as a "nice vista point where warriors of old were hurled off cliffs." Without any context, it seems as though the *kanaka maoli* were ruthless barbarians throwing people off cliffs

for no reason whatsoever. In fact, Nu‘uanu is the site of an epic battle between Kamehameha I, the founder of Hawai‘i, and Kalanikupule. In 1795, Kamehameha I<sup>23</sup> had traveled to Oahu to unite the islands under his rule, but Kalanikupule, a defecting commander, retreated toward Nu‘uanu with his men. Kamehameha I’s forces drove about four hundred of them over the cliffs, ultimately winning over O‘ahu and placing it under his rule. Although part of the foundation story of the islands, the reference to the Battle of Nu‘uanu glosses over Hawaiian history as curious, exotic, but ultimately unimportant. In point of fact, the voice-over asserts the offensive ruling class assumption that “the story of sugar is really the story of Hawaii.”

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**Figure 2.** This image illustrates the benefits of the sugar and pineapple industries in Hawai‘i for the thriving economy. *Na Ailana Kopaa O Hawaii: Sugar Islands of Hawaii*. Frame enlargement. Courtesy of the ‘Ulu‘ulu Henry K. Giugni Moving Image Archive, University of Hawai‘i–West O‘ahu, Daniel K. Inouye Collection.

Just under a minute later, the film shows tidy plantation houses in what the narrator calls “pleasant communities near the mills where the sugar people live.” There is no dust, and there are no “sugar people.” One wonders what they are supposed to look like. The narrator attempts to convince the viewer that the plantation workers lead an idyllic life, with all of the same modern conveniences as mainland workers (Figure 3). There are modern appliances and TV antennas, and “children of many races play and learn together in harmony as they develop into tomorrow’s citizens.” These citizens are not meant to stand up for themselves too much, however, given the plantation’s hostile treatment of striking workers as late as 1946. Instead, they are meant to continue in their parents’ footsteps and remain obedient sugar plantation workers, though perhaps in a different capacity than field hands. In *Hawaii: Paradise Plus*, a voice-over states, “Young people will play an important part in the advancement of the sugar industry. . . . The University of Hawai‘i offers many courses of study which equips [1] young

men and women for employment in sugar.” The accompanying image shows young adults walking toward a building at the University of Hawai‘i. These “new” workers received scholarships from the HSPA to train young men (the women seem to have since disappeared) for important technical jobs on the plantations and in the mills. As was occurring elsewhere with modernization, the mechanization of agriculture was taking over, so fewer workers would eventually be needed, much as was occurring in other industries. However, throughout this particular period, the size of the plantations continued to increase through consolidation, so the kinds of jobs available, the film argues, would be markedly better than what were available to the prior generation. The voice-over argues that the year-round growing season contributes to better living conditions in Hawai‘i than in other areas where the seasonal harvest schedule creates an underclass of migrant workers. The wages for plantation labor were also higher than in many other places around the world. This created a dilemma for the plantation owners and Hawai‘i. The increased mechanization of plantation work required large capital investment, a more highly educated labor force, and fewer overall workers (Figure 4). While that may have seemed to be of interest to the plantation owners, it ended up working to their eventual detriment.

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**Figure 3.** The plantation’s role as a benevolent and paternalistic entity is implied in this image of the plantation houses provided for the laborers. *Na Ailana Kopaa O Hawaii: Sugar Islands of Hawaii*. Frame enlargement. Courtesy of the ‘Ulu‘ulu Henry K. Giugni Moving Image Archive, University of Hawai‘i–West O‘ahu, Daniel K. Inouye Collection.

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**Figure 4.** This image illustrates a cane fire—a regular occurrence during the plantation era of O‘ahu, which ended in the mid-1990s. *Waipahu Plantation #1*. Frame enlargement. Courtesy of the ‘Ulu‘ulu Henry K. Giugni Moving Image Archive, University of Hawai‘i–West O‘ahu, Alan Amos Collection.

The plantation owners had consolidated not only all of their lands but their associated businesses as well, constituting what was called the Big Five: Castle and Cooke, Theo H. Davies & Co., Alexander and Baldwin, C. Brewer & Co., and American Factors. These five

corporations controlled almost all aspects of the economy in Hawai‘i during this time. If there were fewer plantation workers, eventually there would be less money flowing through the economy, and the other aspects of their businesses would suffer. The legislature, seeing this trend, opted to emphasize attracting military spending and tourism over agriculture, leading to the current economy, which is heavily reliant on tourism and military dollars and highly vulnerable to fluctuations in the global economy. There is also a renewed emphasis on agriculture, which is meant to counteract this dependence, though not necessarily in a direction that is as beneficial to Hawai‘i residents as it should be. The current direction of policy makers seems to be to look back toward the plantation system, this time with an industrial monoculture of genetically modified seed corn—a model that has already been tried without success.

## Environmental, Social, and Political Factors: Then and Now

Despite the unflagging optimism pictured in the industrial films, the legacies of the sugar and pineapple plantations continue to plague the Hawaiian agricultural system. Environmental factors, such as soil contamination through the insecticide heptachlor in former pineapple land, make the soil too acidic for growing new and diversified crops.<sup>24</sup> According to the largest organic farmer on O‘ahu, the amounts required for remediation would be cost prohibitive.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, plantation infrastructure diverted water from wet to dry areas of the island, leading to fights over water, most notably in O‘ahu and Maui.<sup>26</sup> Even with the plantations long closed, water is still being diverted, though at lower rates than in previous years. Even more disturbing is the fact that the water diversion system maintains an infrastructure to prepare former sugarcane land for eventual housing or resort development.

Continuing land use policy reflects sociopolitical and economic factors as well as the

plantation mentality that bigger is still better. Large corporations are taking advantage of incentives to lease sizable tracts of land. For example, Monsanto and Pioneer Hi-Bred are the largest “farmers” on O‘ahu, though none of their acreage grows actual food. Instead, the fields are used for experiments with genetically modified seed corn crops. Their agricultural activities have been controversial on all of the islands, especially because the experimentation in question is related to testing for the ability of the seed corn plants to withstand large amounts of pesticides. The old plantation policies of nonmandatory disclosure of pesticide use remain in place. These corporations are in protracted legal and public relations battles with a variety of community groups on all the islands.<sup>27</sup> The latter are requesting disclosure of the kind and amount of pesticides and herbicides in use and some sort of warning before they are applied to crops. They are also calling for mandatory buffer zones for fields located around schools and other community areas. The corporations have withstood the legal challenges thus far. Furthermore, Monsanto has produced its own public information campaign to promote its work in Hawai‘i, using familiar visual imagery reminiscent of the historic industrial plantation films: wide panning shots of the fields and people working together in a seemingly happy environment, with a voice-over that reinforces the benevolence of the corporation, its role in providing jobs, tax revenue, and scholarships for future workers (Figure 5).

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Figure 5. Monsanto uses narratives similar to previous Hawai‘i industrial films, as in *Monsanto Hawaii: Growing Together #1* (published June 8, 2015), depicting happy laborers being directed by a supervisor. <https://youtu.be/BIL52JItFA>.

Like the industrials of the 1940s–60s, the contemporary sponsored commercials argue that corporations grow more than food and that the economy is dependent on them. Both sugar and seed corn are grown for export, and the real tax revenue is paid to the state where the actual seat of the corporation resides. In the case of Monsanto, however (now a division of Bayer), the

corporation was headquartered in St. Louis, Missouri, and Pioneer—a subsidiary of DuPont—is headquartered in Iowa. The premise that these large seed corporations are major contributors to the tax revenue in the state of Hawai‘i is based on contradicting statistics.<sup>28</sup> Yet legislators are so prone to influence by these special interests that they spend more on lobbying and public relations campaigns than community or other groups supportive of sustainable agriculture. The plantation system is making a resurgence, partly through media communications, with all of its attendant problematic settler-colonial legacy and power dynamics. To be fair, there is a growing counternarrative to the industrial monocropping corporate/plantation model of agriculture in Hawai‘i. Mostly, it is diffuse and coming from educational sources, as well as indigenous and community groups working to educate Hawai‘i residents about other opportunities in the agricultural sector.

O‘ahu faces a severe housing crisis. Pressure to develop former plantation land is extremely high, especially since “highest and best use” of land is considered solely through the lens of economic profit.<sup>29</sup> Alternatively, agricultural abundance could be restored through diversified agriculture to redirect Hawai‘i’s economy toward a more sustainable path. Smaller-scale agriculture, with support from various actors within the food system, all the way from educational to legislative support of the kind that has traditionally been offered to large plantations, and now is offered to corporations, would be required for this shift to take place. The Native Hawaiian system of agriculture was as ingenious as it was successful. Traditional practices, together with current agroecological and holistic understandings of the natural world, could transform Hawai‘i’s natural resources into an agricultural bounty.

## Conclusion

The images and narration used in these industrial films promoted a positive view of the sugar and



pineapple plantation economy in Hawai‘i, leaving no room for a critique of industrial agriculture from a sociopolitical perspective that would include the plantations’ effects on society, policy, health, and the environment. The plantation economy is now defunct, with the last plantation harvest having occurred on Maui in December 2016.<sup>30</sup> There is no longer an industry to promote itself. However, the legacy of industrial, monocropping, large-plantation agriculture, with all of its problematic aspects, remains entrenched in policy makers’ attitudes toward agriculture in general.

Given that many legislators and government officials are descendants of plantation worker families, they may support small, diversified agriculture in theory but, in reality, are much less likely to propose legislation and policy that would return people to the land. Their memories of agriculture are filled with red dust and their parents’ hard labor and insistence that they get an education to get off the plantation. It would behoove proponents of sustainable agriculture to create a counternarrative through video imagery that would present alternative viewpoints to the still-dominant perspective of the large agribusiness corporations that have stepped in to tap these memories. Their utopian agricultural narratives appeal to legislators and regulators that portray agribusiness as a “clean,” mechanized, industrial activity that is familiar to people in Hawai‘i, all the while seemingly avoiding the negative connotations of hard plantation labor.

The historical context of plantation labor organization and resistance to working conditions imposed by plantation owners and managers continues to be effaced in the newer version of the corporate agribusiness commercials in Hawai‘i. The influence of these forms of infomercial-style messages is still prevalent in today’s media landscape and shapes policy maker attitudes toward land use policy, preserving the same predisposition toward large industrial

agribusiness growing monocrops for export, instead of shifting focus to a more just and sustainable agricultural system, as originally intended and practiced by precontact Native Hawaiians. These issues are not just relevant to Hawai‘i but, as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization has found, are significant globally as well.<sup>31</sup> The question remains whether we will, as citizens, as consumers, and even as policy makers, continue to buy the messages of corporate benevolence that these moving image narratives are trying to sell us. Will we instead finally be able to move beyond them toward a more sustainable food system that relies on a more socially and environmentally just future? The stakes are high everywhere, and it will be up to citizens and policy makers to critically decipher the available media narratives to determine the most feasible and sustainable path forward.

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## Filmography [2]

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