

Local News

Territorial land laws and issues to be examined in a new book UH doctoral scholar laukea refers to writings of her ancestor

Print Page

Published: Wednesday, June 30, 2010 9:56 AM HST

University of Hawaii doctoral scholar and Mellon Hawai'i Fellow Sydney laukea has signed a contract with the University of California Press to publish a book based on her 2008 doctoral dissertation, "E Pa'a 'Oukou: Holding and Remembering Hawaiian Understanding of Place and Politics."

The manuscript, to be published in mid-2011, examines land laws and land issues of Hawaii's territorial era. It is laukea's personal narrative set within a historical context.

laukea references from the Hawaii State Archives unpublished writings by her great-great-grandfather Curtis Piehu laukea. Mr. laukea held more than 40 political positions in both the Hawaiian Kingdom and the Territorial Government in Hawaii from 1885 to 1940.

"Most of the history taken from this era is not in the words of our kupuna, but from an outside perspective," said laukea, who also researched records in First District Court and the Bureau of Conveyances. "Reading how the kupuna wrote about the territory gives us a much better insight because it's coming from the political actors of the time."

laukea's manuscript draws on her great-great-grandfather's unpublished writing to chronicle Prince Kuhio's suit against Queen Liliuokalani, which charged the queen with mental incompetence in an effort to break her trust.

"It is a case that represents the complicated familial and property relationships that we still encounter today," laukea said. "When the U.S. occupied Hawaii, they rewrote land laws through an American lens that disrespected the world view of the Hawaiian Kingdom and disempowered the kingdom and the queen herself.

"Hawaiian Kingdom nationals were navigating this terrain and active in the system, while a territorial citizenry and landscape was created through land legislations that reworked the national fabric of the Hawaiian Kingdom.

"Much has been left out of our history, and this is one of the cases that have escaped public review. It is important to know all aspects of our history, so that we can navigate our present and future with the knowledge from our kupuna. As contemporary Hawaiians, we are dealing with land issues; we are tied genealogically to kupuna; and what happened then is how we relate to landscape and aina today."

"The publication of laukea's work will garner enormous literary and scholarly attention because it will be one of those rare works that sets personal narrative in a geopolitical context," said Matt Hamabata, executive director of The Kohala Center, which created the Mellon-Hawai'i Fellowship program in collaboration with The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Kamehameha Schools. "It will tell the story of dispossession and displacement in ways that are personally moving and politically challenging. And it will influence the way that we in Hawai'i understand our own history."

laukea received her Ph.D. in political science from the University of Hawaii at Manoa in July 2008, and is Hawaiian studies educational officer with the state Department of Education. Born and raised on Maui, she is a 1987 graduate of Kamehameha Schools.

In 2008, laukea joined in the very first cohort of five Mellon-Hawai'i Doctoral and Postdoctoral Fellowship scholars. The fellowship is designed for Native Hawaiian scholars early in their academic careers and for others who are committed to the advancement of knowledge about the Hawaiian natural and cultural environment, Hawaiian history, politics, and society. The program allows doctoral fellows to complete their dissertations before accepting their first academic posts, and postdoctoral fellows have the opportunity to publish original research early in their academic careers.

The Kohala Center supports the progress of the Mellon-Hawai'i Fellows, bringing the scholars together for retreats that focus on their writing and the presentation of their ideas, as well as introducing scholars to leading intellectuals in Hawaii and to acquisitions editors from Hawaii and the U.S. mainland, such as the University of California Press.

"The Mellon-Hawai'i Fellowship was completely responsible for the publication of my manuscript," laukea said. "It gave me the time and space and support to start the process from dissertation to book and allowed the publishers to come hear us speak on our work."



Click Photo to Enlarge

This map created in 1912 shows the Territory of Hawaii. University of Hawaii doctoral scholar and Mellon Hawai'i Fellow Sydney laukea has signed a contract with the University of California Press to publish a book based on her 2008 doctoral dissertation, "E Pa'a 'Oukou: Holding and Remembering Hawaiian Understanding of Place and Politics." - Courtesy Photo

For more information about the Mellon-Hawai'i Doctoral and Postdoctoral Fellowship Program, visit <http://kohalacenter.org/mellonabout.html>.

The Kohala Center is an independent, not-for-profit center for research and education. As an institution committed to expanding educational and employment opportunities by caring for and celebrating Hawai'i Island's natural and cultural landscape, The Center supports efforts at developing kama'aina leadership for Hawaii's research and educational institutions. See <http://www.kohalacenter.org>.

Copyright © 2010 - Hawaii Tribune-Herald

[\[x\] Close Window](#)