

White Supremacy: Part of the Resolution Workshop, 199th Aha Pae'āina

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Thank you for the invitation to be a part of this important conversation. I start with the disclaimer that I am not a lawyer or a student of international law. I am a religious leader, and my comments come from the perspective of faith.

However, I do wish to observe that Both the Resolution Committee and the Pu'a Foundation in their material *Ua Mau Ke Ea: Sovereignty Endures* raise up similar legal themes and conclusions. The overthrow of Queen Liliuokalani was an illegal act of sedition against a sovereign state and, therefore, involves matters of international jurisprudence.

From the perspective of faith my remarks address the moral and covenantal aspects which are also calling for an accountability of continuing colonial and white supremacist ideology at work in the structures of the Hawaii Conference. My focal point is white supremacy, as that is what I was invited to speak on.

The Anti-Defamation League understands there to be five components of white supremacy:

1. White people should dominate people of other backgrounds, especially where there is a mixing of backgrounds.
2. White people should live by themselves in white-only communities, cultures, and societies.
3. White culture is superior to other cultures.
4. White people are genetically superior to other people.
5. As an ideology white supremacy is singularly focused on the protection of "whiteness" as opposed to racism or bigotry in general which often have the background of the individual practicing racism or bigotry as the focus of protection

The shorter definition: white supremacy is the fiendish belief that white people are inherently superior to others and, therefore, should control non-white people.

If you are aware of the events leading up to the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, then you cannot help but to recognize the role of white supremacist ideology at work in the Committee of Safety and its supporters. Here are some excerpts from the February 1893 edition of *The Friend* as it reports on the illegal overthrow. This is verbatim and I ask that you pay attention to how ethnicity is used to establish who is superior and who is inferior.

- "long suffering whites"
- "The wise, determined, upright leaders, and the honest, courageous, intelligent rank and file" in contrast to the "rotten monarchy."
- In referring to the native Hawaiian population, "No doubt the majority of them are now governed by their long existing jealousy of white ascendancy..."
- "the removal of the terrible incubus of Palace influence, with its debauching and heathenizing effect."

- “we anticipate satisfaction among the natives and their cordial cooperation with the whites in public affairs.”

Those who read my most recent reflection in the May 2021 edition of *The Friend* will recognize the thinking patterns of picturing others as beasts, savages, and contagion in these quotes. All part of the ideology of racism and white supremacy.

At this point I need to put on my Sunday School teacher hat. We will return to the issue of white supremacy, but first we need to take a short tour on the theme of supremacy in the Bible.

As people of faith, we honor the Bible as a collection of sacred stories which have as their common theme the faithfulness of God. And when we read the Bible honestly, we find that embedded in these stories of God’s fidelity the human ideology of supremacy. If we are very, very honest we recognize that the biblical narrative of supremacy is masterfully hidden behind the concept of righteousness.

How does righteousness, understood as a faithful life lived before God, support notions of supremacy which raises one group up as worthy and puts another group down as unworthy? Noah was considered righteous, and this made his family worthy of saving on the ark while all the unworthy perished in the flood. Abraham was righteous and this made his descendants worthy of colonizing Canaan and in the book of Joshua committing genocide against the native peoples of the land who were deemed unworthy of it.

I know that for some of you this is a most uncomfortable Sunday School lesson. Especially if you are unaccustomed to peering behind the texts and asking if there is a human ideology encapsulated within it. As it turns out these attitudes were also prevalent among Israel’s neighbors in the ancient near east. The Hittites, the Sumerians, the Egyptians, and the Mesopotamians all had similar understandings. It turns out that ancient Israel was not so different from their neighbors in this regard.

My point is that good Christians, even the descendants of missionaries, are susceptible to the temptations of supremacy masquerading as righteousness. From the quotes of the February 1893 *The Friend* it is easy to see white supremacy hiding behind the notion of religious righteousness.

For sure the same sacred stories which imbibe supremacy also alert us to the moral injury of wronging one another. In these situations, the scriptures are quite clear: when we become aware of the wrong we have done, we are to be remorseful, confess the wrong we’ve done by commission and omission, and make reparations for the wrong. As Christians we know this spiritual practice from the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus states, “So if you are offering your gift on the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift” (Mt. 5:23-24). This teaching of Jesus is itself a

summary of the Reparation Offering outlined in Leviticus 5 which notes that restitution is to be made to the one who was wronged (Lv. 5:16).

Some may be asking, hasn't the United Church of Christ and the Hawaii Conference United Church of Christ already done this with the apology and redress of the 1990s? There was a time of looking inward and from that time came the apology and even within further conversations the commitment to reparations. Last year in the documentary *A Witness to Aloha*, produced for Kawaiaho Church, I stated that "No apology can make up for historical wounds like (the illegal overthrow of Queen Liliuokalani). But it is an attempt to say to the indigenous Hawaiian population that wrongs were done."

Later, in my reflection in the May 2020 issue of *The Friend*, dedicated to the themes of the bicentennial arrival of the first cohort of missionaries, I wrestled with the passage of Ezekiel 18:2-4 which is a piece of scripture addressing corporate guilt across multiple generations. I note here again what I noted there, "we must ask in this time of Bicentennial observance, what is my role in perpetuating or mitigating the legacy of overthrow and occupation?"

Part of our role is the continued work of unmasking the vestiges of white supremacy through legal and moral recourse. As I asked you to peer behind the words of scripture and examine the motives there, I ask you to pay attention to the motives of addressing white supremacy which stand behind the text of the AHEC Resolution. Let us be concluding the work that still lays ahead of us.