

TALK TO MRS. VIOLET YOUNG'S CLUB, ALPHA DELTA KAPPA,

BETA CHAPTER, FEBRUARY 15, 1975<sup>1</sup>

JEAN CHARLOT

The first thing I saw was Hawaiian tourist art, tourist hula. I didn't want to use those models for the dancers in my mural. So I went to Aunt Jennie. She gave a seated hula. She started with a prayer to Laka; no motion, just prayer. It was almost inaudible, chanting. It was a prayer not for me, but for Laka. One felt there was a contact, something happening up there in response to the weak but mana-filled prayer of Aunt Jennie. Then she danced. She had arthritis, so her gestures were all right angles. But it was great. I really understood what the eighteenth-century people saw. Aunt Jennie is the model for the dancers in the Bachman Hall fresco. She gave the rooting into the past.

Thinking about the term *Hawaiian* and Goodman's book, *The Hawaiians*.<sup>2</sup> He had just come to Hawai'i. He had made a pot of gold, or *pot of silver*, there with *The Australians* and wanted to do the same with the Hawaiians. He is interested only in the present, not in the past. But people thought he changed the term *Hawaiian* to something else; the term began to change in meaning. We had no term for members of the State of Hawai'i. The term is still changing. For instance, the basketball team. God knows what *Hawaiians* will be ten years from now.<sup>3</sup>

I consider Hawai'i went wrong in 1776 with the coming of Cook. I've lost interest in Hawai'i after that. That's why my work has things from pre-Cook times.

The *hula ki'i*—I'm proud of that. I worked hard to resuscitate that dance. No one knew much what it was. It was different already in the time of Kalākaua (he was holding strong against new imports and wanted to keep native traditions and arts, so he was spoken badly of). Kalākaua did something about the hula. Haoles called it "the forbidden dance." A haole woman reported on the coronation; she said there was only a thin veneer of civilization because the Queen and her retinue changed into *mu'umu'us*. She said that suddenly we heard the beginning of drums and knew the indecent dances would begin, so we ladies left.

When one million dollars was asked, it's an Americanized way of saying they're dissatisfied. So it makes me sad. They deserve the money.<sup>4</sup>

Part of Cook was left on the islands. I wrote a play—it's quite interesting. The only handicap is that the play is in Hawaiian. It used Hawaiian sources written not long after Cook—Dibble. A living witness, a little boy at the time, said he'd eaten the heart of Cook; he thought it was a dog's.

I've read English and Hawaiian versions of the death of Cook. No one should get angry. Cook had been to many islands where the natives wanted iron nails. They'd already stolen a boat once and

taken the nails. It happened again in Hawai'i. Cook decided to kidnap what he called the king and keep him until the boat was returned. A lieutenant thought this was "bold." Cook's answer, among his last words, was: "Don't you worry. I know them."

The king was old, a very high chief. He wanted to go on board the ship, but the people knew that the boat had been dismantled, so they couldn't ransom the king. So they followed Cook and the king to the shore. Then they surrounded them and pressed a little. They did it with the other foreigners too. Cook had a sword and two shots. He couldn't get to the ship because there were warriors in front of him, so he got panicky and started to fight. He didn't do much because he fell in a puddle. A warrior chief put his foot on Cook's neck, and he drowned. Nobody killed him; he just died.

Cook had known other islands with less hierarchy. He could get away with it there. But the Hawaiians liked Cook. They gave him the best possible funeral. They cut him in pieces and offered him as a high chief to the gods. The English were uneasy, so the Hawaiians brought bits of Cook back, and peace was established. That's the idea of the play.

Kalani'ōpu'u was in his late nineties when he died. It was old, especially for the Hawaiians of the time. He loved the *hula ki'i*. He loved to mingle with people, to have the hula. One day, a fellow from another island came and was asked how he liked it. He said it was nice except for that old man who ruined everything.

Kalani'ōpu'u didn't feel guilty about the death of Cook.

## QUESTIONS

*Do you speak Hawaiian?*

I don't *converse* in Hawaiian. I don't know the modern terms. I'm very interested in historical documents in the Hawaiian language. For instance, newspapers have things people aren't aware of, such as people near to Cook's death. Hawaiian poetry is a superb thing. *The Kumulipo* is between Genesis and Homer. The other day there was a TV program on Hawaiian, and someone said they had only twelve letters in the alphabet, so they couldn't express themselves well.

Right now, there is a change of Hawaiian from spoken to written. It's very interesting. Homer couldn't read or write. Greek was a language of troubadours, verbal. One could have a fantastic freedom. Then Greek professors put it in writing; you have to have rules. Then it gels, hardens, gets arthritis—accents, etc. I think the verbal language is better than the written. But it has to happen. You have great scholars doing it, freezing it. I try to go back to the verbal Hawaiian, before the written rules. When they publish the grammar of the Hawaiian language, that will be the end. Some old Hawaiians can't follow the new rules.

*How about petroglyphs?*

I've written on that. If you take the earliest Chinese writing—tortoise shell, etc.—that is the moment of petroglyphs. The Hawaiians would have gone to glyphs and then developed writing. It's not the images that interest me, but the moment that language would get a writing of its own, which would follow the language itself. It never happened for Hawaiian.

*How about Egyptian influence?*

I like people with imagination. When you go to that, you miss the beauty of the thing itself. I did Mayan archeology. It's beautiful. But some people don't look at them; they want something else. So they get a connection to Egypt; it's like a tall tale. But then they don't see the beauty of the thing itself. I want to look at petroglyphs and think of the patience of doing it, of the meaning it had for him.

*Do you have a philosophy of life? You do so much. We're so busy.*

I jumped into Hawaiian because we had four children who were childish. I had to concentrate on something. Maybe grandchildren will take their place. Maybe I did it just not to get bored.

*What brought you to Hawai'i?*

Money—not much. My job in Colorado was getting wobbly. I got an offer to come here for the summer—eight weeks—to decorate a wall in Bachman hall. Frenchmen don't know geography. I had two job offers. One was from Haiti to start a Renaissance. I had done something in Mexico. Ben Norris told us about the beauties of Hawai'i. I said, "What about pay?" It was very little, but few classes. So I made plans to go to Hawai'i as a professor and then on weekends go to Haiti.

*Why were you in South America?*

Why do *you* always ask the questions?

*Because I've read a lot about you.*

And you fortified yourself. We were in Venezuela. They have oil and gold mines. We visited my daughter Ann who married a Canadian; that's why they're in Venezuela. We wanted to see them before our granddaughters got married.

*Mrs. Charlot, how did you meet Dr. Charlot?*

DZC: You tell it? Your story's better than mine.

JC: They aren't the same.

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<sup>1</sup> February 15, 1975. Edited by John Charlot. The club members were public school teachers. The talk was given in the living room of my parents' house on Kahala Avenue, Honolulu, Hawai'i. I was upstairs in the bedroom and started to take notes only after my father had begun. The talk was not taped. This talk can be compared with Charlot's Preface to his *Two Hawaiian Plays: Hawaiian-English*, Published by the author, Honolulu, 1976, pp. 68. I thank Mrs. Violet Young and Ms. Lee Huff for information on this talk.

<sup>2</sup> Robert B. Goodman, *The Hawaiians*, Directed and photographed by Robert B. Goodman; Text by Gavan Daws and Ed Sheehan; Designed by Harry Williamson; Edited by Jonathan Rinehart, Island Heritage, Norfolk Island, Australia, 1970.

<sup>3</sup> Goodman's book was criticized in a newspaper review for using the word *Hawaiian* for people who were citizens of the State of Hawai'i but not ethnically Hawaiian.

<sup>4</sup> Charlot is referring to an early Hawaiian demand for reparations.