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Caucasians are haole

By Haunani Kay Trask

November 15, 2002

Mr. Joey Carter's dilemma of whether or not he is a "haole" (Ka Leo, Sept. 6, 1990) can easily be answered. If he is white or "Caucasian" (as he prefers), then he certainly is haole.

This word is one of the few surviving Hawaiian language descriptions in common use in Hawai'i. And it has survived despite official suppression of my Native Hawaiian language by an all-haole, English-speaking American government in 1900. Indeed, Mr. Carter follows in the footsteps of his American haole compatriots who came to Hawai'i in the 19th century demanding that Hawaiians convert to the haole ways of behaving. Now, Mr. Carter demands that we stop using our own land. Too bad, Mr. Carter, you are a haole and you always will be.

And this is precisely Mr. Carter's typically white American problem: he wants to pretend that he is outside American history, a history which has made white power and white supremacy the governing norm from the birth of the American colonies to the present American imperium that holds the world as a nuclear hostage.

Mr. Carter is a privileged member of American society because he is haole, whether he acknowledges his privilege or not. His very presence in Hawai'i, and before that in Louisiana, is a luxury provided him through centuries of white conquest that visited genocide on American Indians, slavery on Africans, peonage on Asians and dispossession on Native Hawaiians.

Hawai'i is presently a colony of the United States, not because we Hawaiians chose that status, but because the American government overthrew our Hawaiian government in 1883 [sic, 1893], and forcibly annexed our islands in 1898. With the overthrow, things Hawaiian were outlawed and things haole American were imposed.

As an American in Hawai'i, Mr. Carter is benefiting from stolen goods. Part of that benefit is the moral blindness of the settler who insists on his "individuality" when his very presence has nothing to do with his "individuality" and everything to do with his historical position as a member of a white imperialist country. Mr. Carter could examine his own presence here, and how things haole, including the English language, the political and economic systems, and the non-self-governing status of Native Hawaiians allows him to live and work in my country when so many of my own people have been driven out.

Of course, Mr. Carter needs to know, before he learns about Hawaiians, that in the long and bloody march of American history, only African-Americans were classed as 3/5 of a person in the American Constitution, that noble document of democracy. Asians were beaten and killed because they were "yellow peril." Only Japanese were interned in concentration camps because they were Japanese, only American Indians were "removed" and "terminated" as a people because they were Indian.

In fact, Mr. Carter does not understand racism at all, another common characteristic of white people. For racism is a system of power in which one racially-identified group dominates and exploits another racially-identified group for the advantage of the dominating group. People of color in America don't have enough power to dominate and exploit white people. That's what the so-called "founding fathers" of the United States intended, and that's how American society operates today. But Mr. Carter hasn't

noticed this reality.

The hatred and fear people of color have of white people is based on that ugly history Mr. Carter is pretending to have an "individual" exemption from, and which he refuses to acknowledge. It is for self-protection and in self-defense that we people of color feel hostility towards haoles.

Contrary to what Mr. Carter believes, this hostility is not "haole-bashing"; it is a smart political sense honed by our deep historical wounding at the hands of the haole. On the rare occasions that we feel something other than hostility, something like trust or friendship for certain haole, it is because we have made an exception for them. It is our privilege and not Mr. Carter's privilege to make exceptions, and to make them one by one. For it would be the mark of extreme historical stupidity to trust all haoles.

In his uninformed, childish moaning, Mr. Carter flaunts his willful ignorance of where he is (in my native country, Hawai'i), and who he is (a haole American). Of course, his statements are disingenuous. If Mr. Carter does not like being called haole, he can return to Louisiana. Hawaiians would certainly benefit from one less haole in our land. In fact, United Airlines has dozens of flights to the U.S. continent every day, Mr. Carter. Why don't you take one?

Haunani-Kay Trask was the director of the Center for Hawaiian Studies in 1990.