

Shala McKee

12/22/17

Made in America/ Made in Hawaii

I wrote the following set of poems to explore my connections with the islands and everything that comes with them. My three poems, "Hawaii vs. Hawai'i", "They say, I say, you say", and a third untitled one, discuss how I see the Hawai'i and how I feel other people see it as well as how locals perceive outside people. I enjoyed writing all three of them because it gave me a chance to really reflect upon the three years I have spent here in Hawai'i. I've learned a lot of things and had a lot of different experiences and though these aren't all mentioned in the poems, they were definitely a part of my writing process. I think this is timely because I'm going to leave these islands for college next fall and I'm glad to say I'm satisfied not only with the poems, but with my time here as well.

Hawaii vs. Hawai'i was conceptually the first poem, but in reality the last one to be completed. I really wanted to use this poem to showcase the difference in perception between people born/raised in Hawai'i and people who are not. I think it becomes clear when reading the poem that I am biased to the concept of Hawai'i which I felt was okay to show because of the theme of the project. I was made in America and then brought to Hawaii only to find out that I preferred Hawai'i. While writing the poem I found that it was harder to come up with things that made Hawai'i and Hawaii similar, but different enough to note. All in all I really enjoyed writing this poem.

"They say, you say, I say" is probably the poem I wrote the fastest. This was the easiest for me because I have spent my entire life being treated differently because of the color of my skin. I thought this was an important thing to touch on in at least one of the poems because it really shapes my experiences in Hawai'i. Most people feel welcomed as soon as they get here,

but it took a little longer for me to feel that way particularly because of the way I was treated. In my experiences before, the children of color would kind of band together against discrimination, but suddenly I was on this island where other marginalized groups were no longer the minority and deemed me to be “other” and “exotic”. This was a very big shock for me. Towards the end of the poem, I realized that I need to acknowledge all of the people who welcomed me despite the fact that my skin was a few shades darker than theirs. I think this poem is important because it does not ignore the racial problems that I face here, but it also doesn't invalidate the kindness I received.

My final poem is untitled. This is possibly my favorite because I combine everyday aspects of life in Hawai'i with major events in history. I'm really interested in studying anthropology in college and I feel like this poem was kind of related to that. For me, considering that poke might not exist without pineapple is incredibly interesting. Albeit, some of these comparisons might seem a bit ridiculous, but when you think about it these could all be plausible. Everything is interconnected so the fact that something small may not be the same without something major is not at all unreasonable. I also really enjoyed finding ways to describe the way I see Hawai'i every day.