

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE UGLY: DISCIPLINARY LISTENING REGIMES AMID VULGAR SOUNDS

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10/5 6:00-7:30PM

THURSDAY

Collaboration Room 3, 4th floor, Building 18,

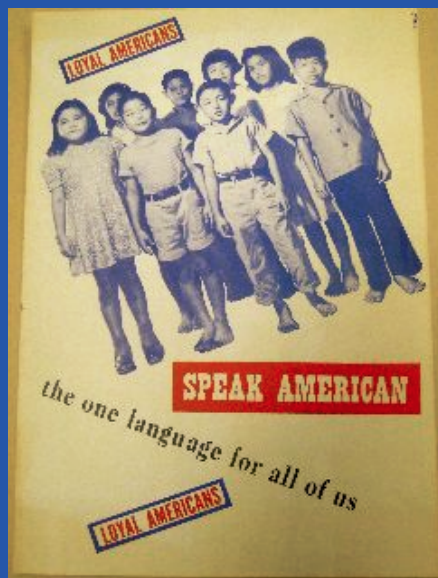
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Abstract

From 1924 to 1960, the U.S. territory and later state of Hawaii instituted a unique practice of segregation in its public schools, called the English Standard School System. By this system, children would be tested for their English language facility: those that passed the verbal test would be placed in select classes or schools; those that did not would be placed in regular educational settings. Initially proposed to the territorial government by white mothers who were concerned that their children enrolled in public schools not mingle unduly with non-whites, the system used language and its policing as a means of race-based segregation.



This talk takes this case study from language as an example of “listening regimes” -- that is, states of order built around disciplinary practices of aurality. Such states of order advance a confluence of morality and aesthetics such that “being good” and “sounding good” overlap. More importantly, disciplinary listening regimes hierarchize sounds as the good, the bad, and the ugly, particularly targeting what might be called “vulgar sounds.”

Through archival documents and interviews with former students, I examine ways by which listening for language use acted as a social and political gauge of assimilationist achievement in Hawai`i.



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