

Ishmael Reed: What's going on in Hawai'i? Tell me about gentrification.

Kathryn Takara: Okay. Well, I'd say first that the population and the tourist demographics are shifting; there are more international buyers of property, homes, and businesses from Japan, Canada, Europe, and now China which affect the local residents, and they are spending more money, driving up the price of real estate. Local residents and our youth too often have to leave home and the islands for better jobs, better wages, and affordable living.

Ishmael Reed: The Chinese?

Kathryn Takara: Yes, one can see the trend even in our tiny town, our little hamlet. I think several homes have recently been sold to Chinese nationals. Tourism, the media, and globalism feed the housing market, and the price of "paradise" is high.

Ishmael Reed: Is anybody occupying them?

Kathryn Takara: Yes, Chinese rent them to Chinese, set up vacation homes, air BnBs, etc.

Ishmael Reed: Yes, because what they do up in Seattle is they buy condominiums and houses and they don't occupy them. The prices of real estate do appreciate.

Kathryn Takara: Oh, well I address this issue in my book *Shadow Dancing, Selling Survival in China*. I observed this phenomenon each time I visited China. I witnessed the rapid growth of these expensive and mostly empty apartments, condos, and complexes in select cities in China – mostly designated for wealthy government officials and business owners.

Ishmael Reed: So they become vestibules.

Kathryn Takara: Yes. Investments. But then there are consequences of rapid growth and wealth: expansion and new hierarchies. A larger significant aspect of expansion is its effects on our local economy, housing, and class. There's the Hawaiian sovereignty movement for self-determination and reclaiming of Hawaiian land, language, institutions, cultural practices, which is very powerful, growing all the time, which is also affected by foreign upper class investments and political trends.

Ishmael Reed: Do they want the monarchy or what?

Kathryn Takara: Well, some want a return of the monarchy, some want the military out of Hawai'i, some want to separate from the United States, some want political status recognition, some want access to significant places, cultural sites, the revival of language and traditional practices, restoration of water rights and better educational and job opportunities.

Ishmael Reed: The American military?

Kathryn Takara: Yes, the American military presence is strong. There is an ongoing struggle over military use and occupation of huge swatches of land in Hawai`i, undetonated ordinances, current military exercises, water and land issues and lawful versus traditional access. An example of land abuse by the military is on Kaho`olawe, a small Hawaiian island, now uninhabited and being replanted and restored by Hawaiian groups.

Ishmael Reed: Where's that located?

Kathryn Takara: It's an island, a small island off of Maui. It used to be a sacred island and the military, I guess in the Second World War and the Korean War, the military used it for bombing practice. So now the Hawaiians are trying to bring it back to its natural and safe native species environment. But in addition to that, in many of the valleys on O`ahu and on other islands, there are still some un-discharged ordinances from military exercises.

So the Hawaiians themselves are divided, like we blacks used to be divided, in terms of what sovereignty means. There are some places where Hawaiians have claimed the land because some families have old documents and recorded records of family settlement and heritage. Actually the state has given maybe one or two concessions. There is the Hawaiians' Homes Land office for distribution of lands, but unfortunately the situation is common where Hawaiian people get on the list for land and sometimes wait for decades, until they're almost dying, just to get a parcel of land. There is also the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, including education, culture, and politics. And then there's a tremendous homeless problem, although we're just a series of small islands.

Ishmael Reed: There's a homeless problem where?

Kathryn Takara: In Hawai`i, and Honolulu, on all the islands, and it's mainly Hawaiians and locals who are homeless, often due to the lack of affordable housing.

Ishmael Reed: Hawaiians.

Kathryn Takara: But not only Hawaiians. I mean there are lots of people who come to the islands from the mainland, because it's supposed to be an easy life, and they're happy to camp out in agreeable weather conditions and available social services. But, yes, we have a huge problem with the homeless like many other cities, so the local government, assisted by the police, forcibly moves people periodically from under bridges, off sidewalks, and out of parks to shelters, or the homeless just relocate to other spaces.

Ishmael Reed: How are the minorities treated?

Kathryn Takara: Maybe some would say more humanely than in other places. But the police move them, especially from around the medical school and the other newly developed areas in town. There's lots of building and moving going on, and there's the coming rail transportation system with burgeoning costs, mismanagement, corruption, and the usual, predictable issues. I would say that the people in the new trendy areas and developments, they're mainly, you don't

call them yuppies anymore, but up and coming techies, and high end investors who are tearing down the old buildings and communities to be replaced with mostly expensive and unaffordable high rises, unavailable for most local residents.

Ishmael Reed: We call them gentrifiers here.

Kathryn Takara: Yes, gentrifiers. There we go. We see it in downtown Kaka`ako and the new cities being developed beyond Honolulu.

Ishmael Reed: In downtown Honolulu?

Kathryn Takara: Yes. They're getting as close to the waterfront as possible. It's like these thundering high end buildings are multiplying, spreading out, at the expense of older, local, low-rise, single dwelling communities and small businesses.

Ishmael Reed: Are these tech people?

Kathryn Takara: Probably some, yes, and some are just rich investors, and entrepreneurial businessmen and women.

Ishmael Reed: Are they outsiders or where?

Kathryn Takara: I would say both. There was this whole Kaka`ako area that used to be locally owned. A big shift, now as several blocks are primarily Japanese-owned and I think it's shifting to the Chinese. I'm not totally up on that. But I know that housing is a huge issue and many, many islanders are moving to the mainland, or living with many family members in one small or large dwelling designed for single families.

Ishmael Reed: But I thought it was a democratic regime, you know. I thought that they were accommodating homelessness and all that.

Kathryn Takara: Well, they have a lot of so called democratic services. Maybe you don't have all that on the mainland. Hawaii offers many health benefits; there are people going out and setting up clinics near the homeless, but a lot of people aren't interested in self-care, you know. I won't say a lot. I won't say a lot, but some people...there are quite a few mentally deficient, crazy patients and veterans who are out of the loop and out on the streets.

Ishmael Reed: Out on the streets.

Kathryn Takara: Yes, out on the streets. Many, many, because they emptied the hospitals and institutions of many patients including the criminally insane and mentally challenged due to budget cuts.

Ishmael Reed: Yes. Well whose idea was that?

Kathryn Takara: Oh, that was way back. It must have been a republican thinking group to cut services to the disadvantaged.

Ishmael Reed: I know Reagan did it here.

Kathryn Takara: Yes, I remember. I was in Berkeley during that time. But I don't know who was governor at that time in the islands when the cuts were made here.

Ishmael Reed: So what is the situation for Black people?

Kathryn Takara: Well, we're growing in numbers in the Hawaiian Islands. We are growing. Our numbers are between 35,000 and 40,000, but including the military residents, maybe more.

Ishmael Reed: Where are they coming from?

Kathryn Takara: Well, a lot of black people leaving the military service are retiring in the islands, having been stationed here in the past. Maybe higher end retirees like officers or maybe not. Hawai'i can claim good health care and social services, a reputation of diversity, beauty, fairly good race relations, and a peaceful environment and communities which attract many people. However, it is a fact that African Americans are represented disproportionately along with Hawaiians and other non-whites in the prisons. I remember personally quite a number of the athletes whom I taught at the University of Hawai'i between the 1970s and 2007, who couldn't really get a good or a reputable job because of stereotypes and they lacked local community contacts from high school and earlier, and much success and status in the islands is due to friends and connections. Many of the black athletes had come from poor neighborhoods on the mainland and so some ended up in jail as well as a fallback on stereotypes of blacks as poor, ignorant, pimps, criminals, and involved in the alternative often illegal economy. We still have a larger than should be percentage of people in the prison (we are about 4% of the general population these days, and we probably are, don't take this figure literally, but I would say about 20% of the prison population). So being young and black not born and raised in Hawai'i can be a definite disadvantage. I think colorism plays a large part of status in the islands.

Ishmael Reed: It's still happening?

Kathryn Takara: Yes.

Ishmael Reed: How do the Native Hawaiians and Blacks get along? Because they're pretty brown.

Kathryn Takara: I think that there's a natural affinity between the two groups, but I also think that a lot of stereotypes prevail, especially if they are mixed race kids, Hawaiian and Black. Too often the black father has gone home to the US mainland after military service and the local/Hawaiian wife or partner has tried to go and live there in a different environment and

culture. Unfortunately, due to the sometimes unfavorable conditions, the wife and mother has chosen to return home to Hawai'i, her family, culture, and people.

Ishmael Reed: Hawaiian women?

Kathryn Takara: Yes, Hawaiian women. I would say that many of the Hawaiian women don't know, or don't know how to learn about and share our history or our culture – for example, illustrious historical figures, black culture, black contributions to American life and society, hair care, or anything dignified and worthy - with their black/Hawaiian children, and so it is not uncommon for children to be raised without knowledge, understanding, or teachings about black history and their family background and heritage.

Ishmael Reed: The kids are pretty neurotic?

Kathryn Takara: Well, times are changing. More black Hawaiians are going to college, that's one good thing. But I also see more educated Black business people who can be role models, not a lot, but more than before. I see Black federal employees, and Black city and county workers, not a lot, but maybe a policeman here or there, two or three, and visible employees for infrastructure companies like electric and water companies, although we are relatively invisible in advertising and the media.

Ishmael Reed: What about the university?

Kathryn Takara: In my opinion, the university has remained in a sad state when it comes to representative numbers of black professors, staff, and students. I have been there only once or twice since I retired early because they did not grant me tenure, despite innovative programs, ideas, and pedagogy that I introduced and practiced. So I think that...

Ishmael Reed: You have published more than most professors.

Kathryn Takara: Well, it depends. The tenure committees don't count poetry, especially in Political Science and Ethnic Studies, they don't count anything in a non-refereed journal or publication.

Ishmael Reed: They don't count publication?

Kathryn Takara: They count publication, but not a poetry publication, and I argued my point that I taught history, politics, and culture – I taught many things in my poetry, including philosophical paradigms. Of course, now everyone is teaching this cross-disciplinary, inter disciplinary approach that I used to do from the beginning of my University of Hawai'i at Manoa career. But anyway, so back to the Black Hawaiians, who are mainly living on the Leeward side – like Waianae, and Lualualei and places way out there in Makaha and Maili, and don't get to higher education.

Ishmael Reed: Don't they have like a little community there?

Kathryn Takara: Because of the mothering, I think that it's a pretty mixed community out there on the Leeward coast where there is a fairly large black military presence. And then, there are many Hawaiians as you suggested who are as dark as we African Americans are, or maybe even darker. But in terms of giving these black and mixed race children a knowledge of honorable black history in Hawai'i (documented but not taught, since the late 18th century), a knowledge of black history in the USA since the 1600s, I think a sense of self-respect, dignity, pride in one's heritage, and a positive self identity are often lacking.

Ishmael Reed: Hawaiians. Among the Hawaiians?

Kathryn Takara: Black Hawaiians.

Ishmael Reed: Oh, Black Hawaiians.

Kathryn Takara: The Black Hawaiian mixture. For example, some kids, the local kids, will go up to many black Hawaiian kids and say, "Hey, bro, you got some smoke?" I mean, just these non-productive, negative stereotypes associated with drugs, criminality, etc. persist that a young person shouldn't have to feel. There is the expectation by others that young people, especially African-Hawaiians, will conform to the stereotypes.

Ishmael Reed: They get that from television.

Kathryn Takara: Yes, and from lingering stereotypes from the dominant Caucasian culture and those most affected by status and power relations. So all that vanguard style and music following African American musicians are appreciated when African American entertainers come through. We have a Blue Note club from New York in Honolulu now, so...

Ishmael Reed: Oh, yes? A Blue Note?

Kathryn Takara: Yes. So all the top musical talent comes through on their way to Asia – Japan, Philippines, China, etc. Often the lead band is a local well-known group.

Ishmael Reed: Does Taj Mahal go through there?

Kathryn Takara: I don't know. I haven't seen him for years. I kind of think maybe he still has a house on Kaua'i, I think it was. But other issues of black community and presence on the islands persist. On the Honolulu town (leeward) side, we have a few churches that are predominately Black and some members even perform hula, so they have kind of assimilated and are long time residents. Other places where groups of blacks congregate are the Greek sororities and fraternities, the Masons, the Eastern Stars, a small and growing cultural center, Martin Luther King events, Black History month events, various concerts and jazz clubs, and the African American film festival, which has been quite successful for several years.

Ishmael Reed: When's the next one?

Kathryn Takara: The film festival is always in February and they're held at the Honolulu Museum.

Ishmael Reed: I ought to get my movie down there.

Kathryn Takara: Yes. Try. I'll get you the submission guidelines and try to put you in touch with the people who do the selections.

Ishmael Reed: So when is the first time you went to China?

Kathryn Takara: My travels to China began in 1995.

Ishmael Reed: So who arranged that?

Kathryn Takara: I went with the East-West Center at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa (UHM), and it's a curious little story. I was teaching Ethnic Studies/Black Studies at UHM. I was approached by a woman, Dr. Elizabeth Buck, Director of the Asian Studies Development Program (ASDP) at the East-West Center, who saw the value of including underrepresented minorities in ASDP programs in order to introduce and encourage infusion of Asian Studies into the curriculum of HBU's and other minority serving educational institutions. She hired me to help her with research and outreach. She explained to me that there was an Asian American Development Program that she had envisioned and her idea was to have these kinds of exchanges, but she noted that there were no exchanges that included or targeted Blacks, African Americans, Native Americans, or Hispanics. The participants were all basically White males. That was who represented America and the West. And the East was represented by Japan, China, SE Asia, Indonesia, whatever, but not so much representation by the Pacific Islanders. So Dr. Buck saw this lack of representation, diversity, and inclusion. She hired me to research mostly minority serving universities, to contact and inform them of ASDP, and to encourage administrators and faculty to apply to the East-West Center ASDP program which was largely funded by various government agencies. I was appointed as an East-West Fellow for a year or two to research HBCUs, other minority serving colleges and community colleges, and to establish contacts and programs that handled faculty exchanges with an aim to bring them on board. So she wanted me...she hired me to do this. However, as I saw the value in the ASDP programs and I met the Black participants, scholars and administrators who would attend, I said, "Oh, this is interesting." Dr. Buck, who's a White woman originally from Alabama and who is still my dear friend, encouraged me to apply as a participant after I took a few summer courses required for travel by ASDP, and I was accepted! I went on my first trip to China in 1995, and because it was a Fulbright funded event with about ... we must have been seven or eight Black people, it was highly respected by the Chinese and American authorities. We were a solid noticeable black group out of about twenty participants. We all stayed in the Foreigners' Guest House at the University of Peking while we completed a short course in Chinese language, culture, history, and taiji. We were always a little bit leery about the government and security,

especially in 1995 in China, wondering, “What’s in the light bulb up there?” so we would go outside and have deep and sometimes critical conversations . . . with others.

Ishmael Reed: Oh, you mean, they were spying?

Kathryn Takara: Well let’s say in the early days after China opened up to the West, there was always a watchful eye, even in buildings. Now we have a watchful eye over here in the USA and the West with camcorders, cameras, cell phones, etc. But in the early days, that was just appalling to us self-righteous Americans that someone would be watching us, so we would go outside for any significant discussions, critiques, analyses. My initial interest was to meet the **African students** who were at the University of Peking, fondly known as Beida.

Ishmael Reed: And how were they being treated?

Kathryn Takara: Well, you see, that was why my interest was in their experiences in China, being a political scientist with a focus on the politics of race. As you know, back then there was this huge scandal about Chinese women dating African men. You remember, you heard of that.

Ishmael Reed: Who was in power then?

Kathryn Takara: Don’t ask me the name –

Ishmael Reed: What year was that?

Kathryn Takara: 1995.

Ishmael Reed: Mao Zedong had died.

Kathryn Takara: Yes. He had passed on in 1976, followed by Hua Guofeng and Deng Xiaoping. But what was interesting to me, not only were there the African students, who were all graduate students in international relations, finance, or in preparation for leadership, but no matter what public building you went in, there were always portraits of African leaders on the wall next to mainly Chinese leaders. Big pictures.

Ishmael Reed: Yes, I saw that. They even had Robert Williams up there, Montgomery Leadership Conference, or whatever that is.

Kathryn Takara: No, I didn’t know that.

Ishmael Reed: Yes, we were there.

Kathryn Takara: So anyway, so I couldn’t find many Black students or African artifacts in the museums that first visit. But they treated me very well.

Ishmael Reed: Getting back to the African students.

Kathryn Takara: Yes?

Ishmael Reed: Were they segregated from the rest of the population?

Kathryn Takara: They were at the university just like we were. They lived in the same buildings with other international students, although often on the same floor, at that time.

Ishmael Reed: Okay. So what happened with the dating issue? Was that resolved?

Kathryn Takara: It must have been.

Ishmael Reed: My understanding was that they were attacked.

Kathryn Takara: Yes, maybe way back then, because in the 1980s and 90s, I was very interested in that question back then, but now it's mellowed out and there are many African businessmen, especially those in independent or joint ventures south of Beijing and you now have some African American professionals in urban areas, often employees for American and other corporations and offices in China. Nowadays the Chinese presence in Africa, contributing to infrastructure and extracting rich natural resources, has become an issue, but there is an element of exchange still present.

Ishmael Reed: So what was your first impression? Was this a culture shock for you? I mean going over there from Hawai'i or . . .

Kathryn Takara: Well, I didn't know the language, number one. I did not speak the language, so that was a separating factor. But my very first time there in Qingdao, our interpreter on the tour bus, Xue Rong Feng, introduced me to a "closet" poet who was high up in the Shandong educational department. We got to talking though Xue, and then the following year, Xue ended up coming to the East-West Center in Honolulu for a year. She told me that whenever I wanted to come to China, she would hook me up with a teaching position, and that she was in an influential governmental position with University connections. Ishmael Reed:

What was her name?

Kathryn Takara: Xue Rong Feng, she's in my book *Shadow Dancing* and pictures of her as well.

Ishmael Reed: Okay, so you were friends since the '90s.

Kathryn Takara: Yes, she died a few years ago, and I wrote a long poem and elegy for her in *Shadow Dancing*. She introduced me to several high ranking University professors and deans as well as some affluent business men in the community, one of whom I later tutored.

Ishmael Reed: This was in Beijing?

Kathryn Takara: No. In Qingdao, located in legendary Shandong Province.

Ishmael Reed: Oh, okay.

Kathryn Takara: My connections, now friends, are why I always go there when I travel to China (8 times now).

Ishmael Reed: Where's that located?

Kathryn Takara: It's out on the Northeast coast, north of Shanghai. It used to be ten hours to travel by boat, but with the fast trains now it's probably closer to five hours. It's a picturesque port and manufacturing city on the ocean. They produce a lot of refrigerators, electronic items, textiles, and cars. But anyway, I love that city because it is located between the mountains and the sea, reminding me of home in Hawai'i.

Ishmael Reed: You had students?

Kathryn Takara: Not the first time I was there. I was on an educational tour Fulbright group with the East-West Center and we traveled from Northeast to Southeast China visiting and spending a few days at seven universities along the way.

Ishmael Reed: And you were writing.

Kathryn Takara: And I was writing, observing, and experiencing the newness. So when I went back the second time in 1997 –

Ishmael Reed: How many times have you been there?

Kathryn Takara: Eight, counting this past year, 2017.

Ishmael Reed: All the same city or different places?

Kathryn Takara: Always Qingdao and Beijing, and neighboring towns and villages.

Ishmael Reed: Beijing.

Kathryn Takara: Yes. I have University and community friends, in those places. Fortunately as a guest of universities and/or friends, I didn't ever have to pay for food and lodging, only my transportation. My good friend, Gu Xiulin, in Beijing also taught at the Beijing University. She used to study at the East-West Center and live in Hawai'i, so between my friends and university connections, I always had invitations and lectures I could give to enhance their programs. The pay was nominal, 200 to 600 yuan, but each experience was so rich!

Ishmael Reed: Did you bring any Chinese people over to Hawai'i?

Kathryn Takara: Not exactly, but I'm thinking of bringing the professor/poet Peter Dong Feng. The East-West Center has been very successful in bringing Chinese scholars to Hawai'i. Also, at

the university, there is a Center for Chinese Studies and a Confucius Institute for Chinese Studies.

The politics of color in China continues to change, improve, be interesting, and still be problematic. For example, in 1995, my Blackness was a rare curiosity. Even up until this last time I went, I hardly saw any Black tourists. I saw a few Black students, maybe six to eight Black students in Qingdao and a few more in Beijing, counting African students.

Ishmael Reed: This was recently? Kathryn Takara: Yes, this was in 2017. But, remember, when I go there I don't stay where tourists stay. I stay out in a community, in the deep, where there are mainly only Chinese nationals. So...

Ishmael Reed: How do they accept you? They know you now?

Kathryn Takara: They know me. Yes, and they like my work and are starting to translate it more. See, that was a thing, and I talked about it in my introduction to *Shadow Dancing*, how initially I thought they loved me because I was Black. But I think that their fascination with me and my cultural/history lessons was more about the black political struggle against racism, oppression, and the fight for equality that they still admired and used as a critique of the USA.

Ishmael Reed: That's what we hear when we go over there.

Kathryn Takara: Yes, yes, it was our whole black freedom movement, a people's revolutionary movement, that dignified me in a way that...so that I could teach Black history, women's literature, minority literature, contemporary issues and trends.

Ishmael Reed: Over there?

Kathryn Takara: Yes. I mean just a few lectures each year at various universities and colleges, even at the national Women's Center in Beijing. I'm not talking a whole semester of work. I was able to lecture on minority women writers and their work, I could speak on different periods of black history, so generally I was allowed a lot of leeway to talk about contemporary issues of race, color, and class as well as minority experiences and cultures in the USA. And then, perhaps best of all, I could read my poetry to young writers, students, and a few professors of American literature, trends, and issues.

Ishmael Reed: How many books have you gotten out of this?

Kathryn Takara: Two books, a couple of essays, but the China poems have also been scattered overall in several of my other books which include detailed glossaries.

Ishmael Reed: That's a lot of work. That's a lot of work in this book, *Shadow Dancing*.

Kathryn Takara: Thank you.

Ishmael Reed: Are you going to stay in Hawai`i or what?

Kathryn Takara: I think I will remain here, unless I become too ill and my children choose to bring me to California, or if they don't want to return to live in Hawai`i. I would prefer to be in Hawai`i because it's very peaceful, inspiring, and spiritual. Our home is located in a small picturesque hamlet, nestled between the mountains and the ocean, surrounded by copious tropical plants, fruit trees, and a garden with my Dad's collard greens. I like that, you know, a Tuskegee girl, a country girl in a rural setting.

Ishmael Reed: Yes, but it seems like there's some growing problems...

Kathryn Takara: Oh, there are always a lot of problems, socio-economic and cultural. I'm working with this project called the "Key Project" which is basically a rural Hawaiian community project and they face the same mediocre education, poor schools, lack of training for high end jobs, and especially housing issues. A common problem is when Hawaiian Homestead owners die, then the land must be divided amongst the heirs. Their lives become shattered, and families often end up moving to crowded, sometimes public housing, renting a space that no longer touches the earth. Others unfortunately become homeless and victims to the many pitfalls of that lifestyle.

Ishmael Reed: So are you getting something like the very rich and the very poor on the islands?

Kathryn Takara: Yes, we're starting to get more of that.

Ishmael Reed: And the middle class is disappearing?

Kathryn Takara: Very much so, and it's a phenomenon. It's everywhere, and our Hawai`i government is starting to shift. It is supposed to be very democratic, largely democratic, but there are growing numbers of wealthy and privileged Trump supporters emerging in Hawai`i. I mean, I wouldn't say they are 30% of the population, but I would say that people seem to be coming out more when it comes to voting republican politics and policies.

Ishmael Reed: Yes, this is the last stand of the White resistance, trying to make it a White country, but it's not going to happen.

Kathryn Takara: No, it's not going to happen. There's still an awful lot of interracial marriage in Hawai`i which obscures the borders and boundaries, and that trend seems to have spread to certain areas in the USA.

Ishmael Reed: So they bring that racism on out now. Trump people, NRA people, PAC money, etc.

Kathryn Takara: Yes, Hawaii is home to the upper class settlers and retired people who can afford to live here, to the military, and now big business, and they just bring out conservative ideas of white privilege.

Ishmael Reed: They don't find a hallway anymore. That's a euphemism.

Kathryn Takara: But they usually don't have the same level of racist colorism and violence that's happening over on the mainland, because a measure of tolerance of diversity is required as a social reality to live in these islands. However, on my Face book feed, I daily read about blacks and minorities on the mainland, too often being arbitrarily beaten (often by the police), insulted, imprisoned, murdered, forever facing degrading stereotypes and/or discrimination, and even efforts to lynch them in these times.

Ishmael Reed: Oh no, this racial profiling here is being heightened. I told my wife Carla that I got racially profiled in the cemetery. I love to tell that joke. That's a joke. That's absurdity. This is a landmark cemetery here (from the 19th century) called Mountain View. It just got written up in The Times. You know Mountain View Cemetery? It's become a tourist attraction up in the hills (above Oakland and Berkeley). A lot of famous stiff's are there. Confederate soldiers came out here and it's a very famous cemetery, so in The New York Times in the travel section they wrote it up. So my family did our errands, you know, we were taking a little rest there. Someone called the cops on us for doing nothing, sitting. What did they expect me to do, steal in the cemetery? You know what I mean?

Kathryn Takara: I do.

Ishmael Reed: Harassment's really gotten heightened up.

Kathryn Takara: I know. Black While Doing Anything. Selling real estate, going to a pool, delivering mail, walking in a white neighborhood. Anything.

Ishmael Reed: Jerry Brown left that for us. Jerry Brown. He announced that he was going to break Black Power. He came over here to our house when he was acting as a populous. He had a show called "We the People." Populism, too, and as soon...I did his inaugural poem that day and the Chronicle said it was the highlight of the day. Jerry Brown was hanging out with the Black Panthers and all this old kind of stuff and as soon as he got into the office he changed.

Kathryn Takara: Turned.

Ishmael Reed: Brought the military in here, broke Black business...Black businesses were put out...protests...closing down their business.

Kathryn Takara: Well now it's the corporations that are putting people out of business.

Ishmael Reed: He said he was going to bring 10,000 techies in here and that's what he did.

Kathryn Takara: That's all down in Emeryville and all of that.

Ishmael Reed: There are people living in tents down here under the freeway.

Kathryn Takara: I know. I saw them. I saw them.

Ishmael Reed: That's your neo-liberalism for you.

Kathryn Takara: In Hawai`i the governor and politicians are talking about the inability to keep up with the need for low income housing and they can't keep up with it, you know. They talk about job training, but then you have republican appointed leaders like Betsy DeVos, and people like that who are just reversing civil rights and equal opportunity ...

Ishmael Reed: Quacks. They just put them in charge of consumer...some guy who was the attorney for payday loans. Consumer Protection Agency. Payday loans. These payday loans, poor people pay 40%...

Kathryn Takara: I know. Ishmael Reed: 300% interest.

Kathryn Takara: Yes, I know.

Ishmael Reed: Like slavery, you know.

Kathryn Takara: Just, since I was here, I've had a couple of people who were close to me who passed on. One was Senator Daniel Akaka, the Hawaiian who understood power and minority issues. He died in 2018, so I wrote a long, biographical and historical tribute to him, though it's not been published yet. I actually got help from his daughter, Millannie, with some of the details, for example, he never wore shoes until he was fifteen years old and he walked miles to school and back. Anyway, he reminded me of my dad, poverty, and overcoming the odds and barriers to success.

Ishmael Reed: What about Frank Marshall Davis? That book, your book.

Kathryn Takara: Yes, sales are just trickling along. It includes black history in Hawai`i and the politics of race and class in Chicago, Atlanta, and Hawaii in the 1930s-80s.

Ishmael Reed: Yes, because he was controversial when Obama was running.

Kathryn Takara: Yes, he was. The right wing discovered my research on him, and the rest is history.

Ishmael Reed: I mean you introduced me to him.

Kathryn Takara: Yes.

Ishmael Reed: And I had photos taken, which I sent to my archives.

Kathryn Takara: Oh, good, good.

Ishmael Reed: When did he die? Kathryn Takara: 1987 I think.

Ishmael Reed: (To Tennessee Reed) Kathryn wrote a biography on Frank Marshall Davis who came up in the Obama...remember they tried to say...

Kathryn Takara: They even made a video.

Ishmael Reed: Yes. Tried to smear him as a communist.

Kathryn Takara: Yes, not only that, but they said Davis was Obama's real father. There was a video of that and it was just...

Ishmael Reed: Dinesh D'Souza made it.

Kathryn Takara: Oh, I don't know, but it was...

Ishmael Reed: Davis is in the American Canon. They got this, you know, the official canon. He's in there.

Kathryn Takara: I know. Yes, well, that's how I met the woman who introduced me to him. I was teaching some poetry by Frank Marshall Davis in my Black Studies class at the University of Hawai'i out of my anthology on Black literature, and she says, "That's Daddy. He lives down in Waikiki. Do you want to meet him? I've been telling him about your class since it began." So, that's how I met F.M. Davis. We became friends and I completed my PhD research and dissertation on him: his life, politics, struggles as a black journalist, poet, and labor and social activist.

Ishmael Reed: So you gotta be proud of your daughter Karla Brundage. We published her book. She's a good writer. Kathryn Takara: She's also a very hard worker.

Ishmael Reed: Going over to Ghana and all that, organizing that trip and everything.

Kathryn Takara: She founded and organized WO2WA. West Oakland to West Africa, as her poetry thesis project in 2016-17.

Ishmael Reed: Then you got Natasha with all of those great kids and everything.

Kathryn Takara: Daughter Natasha's doing pretty well.

Ishmael Reed: So you don't think you're going to leave Hawai'i?

Kathryn Takara: Only to visit other places. I love to travel.

Ishmael Reed: How does your husband Harvey feel about it?

Kathryn Takara: Oh, I know he wouldn't want to leave Hawai'i, but he might consider it if our daughter Natasha insisted later in life.

Ishmael Reed: He would leave?

Kathryn Takara: He might. He might. He's retired so he's doing pretty good, he's finding his balance, you know, when you retire, it's just... different.

Ishmael Reed: So, let's go back a step. How was it growing up in Tuskegee?

Kathryn Takara: Well, it was wonderful and it was horrible. It was largely a well-educated Black community in Tuskegee, Alabama, that was very nurturing, inspiring, aspiring to equality and first class citizenship, and hopeful. There were lots of role models, mentoring, and history kind of just floating all around. And then there were the sharecroppers, the poor and uneducated, who lived out by Notasulga, Chehaw, and all around the town and Macon County.

Ishmael Reed: Right. Black sharecroppers.

Kathryn Takara: Yes. Tuskegee was in Macon County so we were like, we were a 70, 80% Black county. I mean, it was a Black belt for sure, in the deep South. However, there was this buffer to poverty and lack. It was a cushion effect at the college full of rich history and a promising future. On campus there was the movie, museum, theater group, parties and there was the...

Ishmael Reed: Were you...you lived on the campus?

Kathryn Takara: No.

Ishmael Reed: Where'd you live?

Kathryn Takara: No. We lived on five acres, two miles away from the campus. My dad bought land, built a home, and a small veterinary clinic. He developed his own private veterinary practice and he was also teaching at the university (the college or the institute...it was called Tuskegee Institute in those days).

Ishmael Reed: He knew George Washington Carver.

Kathryn Takara: Dad worked with George Washington Carver on peanut oil therapy from 1937-41, and they wanted to try it on President F.D. Roosevelt, who was coming to Tuskegee. Was he the one that was paralyzed?

Ishmael Reed: Yes, yes.

Kathryn Takara: And they worked side by side. My dad learned a lot from working with Dr. Carver trying to develop this liniment that was going to hopefully work to cure or alleviate President Roosevelt's (and others') paralysis...so when President Roosevelt came down to Tuskegee, according to my mother's and others' reports, his wife, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, was very open to communication and doing things for and with the Blacks in the south – for example, she flew with a Black pilot to show the Black pilot's competency and reliability. She was a courageous pioneer and open to breaking many conventional customs, but the president remained aloof.

Ishmael Reed: Tuskegee Airmen. By her actions and willingness, Mrs. Roosevelt gave her support to the Tuskegee Airmen. The Tuskegee Airmen were skilled. They weren't cowards. She contradicted the ongoing paradigm that blacks were inferior. They, they, the idea...the racists in the War Department said that Black people were cowards, even though they were the first ones to reach the Rhine. The Tuskegee Airmen were the first ones to reach the Rhine to Hitler. So Eleanor Roosevelt went down there and flew with one of them.

Kathryn Takara: And I think part of blacks in the military had to do with the Black colleges, education, the ROTC, and the mostly-white people who were the trustees and policy makers on the Black college Boards of Directors. I think Mrs. Roosevelt and her husband might have been on the Board of Directors at Tuskegee, you know, and the Boards kind of determined what the Black presidents were going to do, say, support, and all of that.

Ishmael Reed: Your parents were teaching on campus at that time?

Kathryn Takara: Yes.

Ishmael Reed: So what did they say about her visit?

Kathryn Takara: I can't remember when Mrs. Roosevelt was there. It was maybe '41? I was just being born, but I know my parents both said that she was there in Tuskegee, and she went up with a black pilot. My Godfather was an early Tuskegee Airman named Benjamin O. Davis, and he was the second Black General in the United States.

Ishmael Reed: Oh, that's your Godfather?

Kathryn Takara: Yes.

Ishmael Reed: Benjamin Davis is your Godfather?

Kathryn Takara: Yes. General B.O. Davis.

Ishmael Reed: General.

Kathryn Takara: Yes. He was the second black general. Ben's father was the first black general, and B.O. Davis, my Godfather, was the second. He was the leader of the first group of Tuskegee Airmen.

Ishmael Reed: Wow.

Kathryn Takara: I can remember when the airmen used to come and buzz our house and other places during practice. It was so exciting. We would all run outside and wave. We would also go with our parents to visit Moton Field where the planes were kept and the airmen practiced and then the kids would go swim in the creek nearby on hot summer days.

Ishmael Reed: You never told me that.

Kathryn Takara: Oh, yes, Ben was my Godfather. I still have pictures old pictures...

Ishmael Reed: I'm sitting here with Troy Duster. I've known him for years

Kathryn Takara: He teaches at U.C. Berkeley, right?

Ishmael Reed: Ida B. Wells' grandson.

Kathryn Takara: Oh, oh, I didn't know that.

Ishmael Reed: I didn't know that until last year or so.

Kathryn Takara: Oh, my gosh. See?

Ishmael Reed: He's very modest about it. That's something... Benjamin Davis... this is historic. When I used to be a kid delivering Black newspapers, he'd be in there all the time. He said that the White man would have to follow his orders.

Kathryn Takara: And the things that Davis said about me in his book, in his autobiography, were so perceptive. He and Aggie visited my parents and us in Hawai'i on several occasions. We corresponded through the years with the help of his wife, Aggie, who was my Godmother. She was a great letter writer. He would say, "My goddaughter K had assumed much of the understanding and attitudes of a citizen of the world. She was a remarkable person – a scholar, teacher, poet, and lover of beauty in all its myriad forms... She was married to an aspiring artist."

Ishmael Reed: Married to an artist? You?

Kathryn Takara: Yes, my husband, Harvey Takara. And Ben just... he read me, you know. He read me right.