

Kathryn Takara: Speaking of Tuskegee, I mean, we were such a close community. Everyone knew each other and...

Ishmael Reed: The Klan marched through there?

Kathryn Takara: Oh, yes. Some black adults said you could look at their shoes and tell who was who. Members of the KKK were the Sheriff, business owners, politicians. They thought we were dumb.

Ishmael Reed: So the Klan marched through there. Was in 1900, 1901, WWI, something like that?

Kathryn Takara: No, the Klan was still marching and burning crosses when I was a child ... '48/'49/'50 and beyond.

Ishmael Reed: They marched through town and Benjamin Davis put on in his uniform and went out and sat on the porch.

Kathryn Takara: Oh, see? That's a story I don't know. I don't know that story. So, was it him or was it his father?

Ishmael Reed: It was his father who fought in the Philippines in WWI during the invasion.

Kathryn Takara: Yes. And then, talking about some early Black settlers in Hawai'i, some of those Black men, not airmen, but maybe of the 25th Infantry, some of them never went back to the mainland after their station in the Philippines. They had experience. They stayed in Hawai'i and started businesses. Barbershop, caterers, things like that.

Ishmael Reed: Some stayed in Europe?

Kathryn Takara: Yes, but we're talking two different theaters – the Pacific and Europe. Well, I'm sure some stayed in Hawaii. But it was just kind of interesting that I did an oral history on some of the settlers after WWII who knew veterans in Hawai'i from WWI and the Pacific Theater.

Ishmael Reed: Did the general come to your house?

Kathryn Takara: Oh, yes. My godfather, General Benjamin O. Davis.

Ishmael Reed: He came to your house?

Kathryn Takara: In Tuskegee and in Hawaii, but especially when we were living in Tuskegee. Our house was like a welcoming place for a lot of people that came to Tuskegee, writers, politicians, scholars, speakers. Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Ralph Ellison and others. A lot of the artists and the speakers that would come to the college...my parents would have gatherings and host them. We had a nice large home and property.

Ishmael Reed: Dunbar was visiting your home?

Kathryn Takara: I don't remember him. I was too young. But I heard that Paul Dunbar, Paul Robeson, Richard Wright, various HBCU presidents, and the Tuskegee Airmen, were among those who visited. I have to really go back. I still have my diaries. I'm just getting ready to do my memoir, so maybe some of that stuff will come up, but at least we were aware as a group of role models and people who were successful movers and shakers. We can call them Afro-futurists these days.

Ishmael Reed: Who were some of the people you grew up with who went on to become...?

Kathryn Takara: Well, Kathleen. Kathleen Cleaver, Wendell Paris, Lionel Richie, and many others became successful in their careers.

Ishmael Reed: Oh, yes?

Kathryn Takara: She was Kathleen Neal (before Kathleen Cleaver).

Ishmael Reed: She was down at Tuskegee?

Kathryn Takara: Yes. We grew up together in early years and then she attended George School in Pennsylvania after I graduated, just before college activism, SNCC, now Eldridge Cleaver, and the Black Panther Party.

Ishmael Reed: And who were her parents?

Kathryn Takara: Her dad, Ernest Neal, was a Father at the Episcopal Church.

Ishmael Reed: Oh my god.

Kathryn Takara: Her mom, Julette Neal, I can't remember if she worked at the campus or not. People tended to work at the campus or the VA Hospital in Tuskegee for African Americans. I don't think she worked at the VA Hospital. We had that beautiful VA Hospital in Tuskegee that was a medical facility and center for Blacks who had been in the military from all over. It was a beautiful hospital with manicured grounds, and now it's gone. I mean, the physical plant is there, but it's kind of predominately White now, and the multiple services for veterans have gone down to 1/20th of what they were previously offering. So a lot of my friends were children of those who were connected with the VA or with the now university campus. But I was like my dad, not pigeon holed on class and color attitudes. My dad was very egalitarian and his business developed with his position as Professor and Co-Founder of Tuskegee Veterinary School.

Ishmael Reed: He wrote a book, right?

Kathryn Takara: Yes. *People are the Funniest Animals*. Then he wrote *A Challenge to Christianity*. That's a spoof. He also wrote *Some Bastardly People*. He wrote several books that are spoofs and a couple of books on Blacks in Veterinary Medicine, all out of print now, although I still have copies for sale. But I digress.

Ishmael Reed: You said you went to school with some of these people?

Kathryn Takara: Yes. Kathleen Cleaver and also Carol Munday (Lawrence), she was one of the early Black Women film producers. She worked in Boston for many years and then moved to California and then she married a prominent civil rights attorney and law professor.

Ishmael Reed: You were in the **Civil Rights Movement**.

Kathryn Takara: Yes, but you know, I spent a lot of time away from Tuskegee after 9th grade, when I went to High School and college in the Northeast. That's how I met Q.R. I met Q.R. Hand in the Civil Rights Movement up in New Haven, Connecticut, at a conference.

Ishmael Reed: What about **education**? Where did you go to school? You went to school in the North?

Kathryn Takara: I attended primary school (Chambliss Children's House) and first year High School in Tuskegee. Then I went to George School in Bucks Co, Pennsylvania, and then to Tufts in Boston, Massachusetts.

Ishmael Reed: I see.

Kathryn Takara: For High School, I went to George School, a Quaker school in Bucks Co, Pennsylvania. Public education for Blacks in Alabama was difficult, with hand-me-down books, often poor facilities, and limited subjects offered. So my parents decided to send me north for a better education and more opportunities. George School was the

beginning of my writing aspirations, encouraged by my English professor, Ken Keskinen who thought I held promise as a writer.

Ishmael Reed: I see. Which university did you go to up there?

Kathryn Takara: Tufts University, Jackson College. I would go home to Tuskegee during the summer and other holidays, when I was not traveling in France ('62) and West Africa, Niger ('63). I selected Tufts because of its premed focus. I thought I wanted to be a doctor, inspired by my father, a veterinarian, but I ended up as a French major, like my mom who was a professor of French, German, and English at Tuskegee Institute. My first summer in France was the first time in my life I felt free from the burden of colorism and racism. I selected a minor in English (poetry) as I developed my skills of writing poetry and prose under the guidance of my professor, X.J. Kennedy.

Ishmael Reed: What was the **first recognition you got as a writer**?

Kathryn Takara: I was a Tufts class poet at graduation and read an original poem for an audience of 2,000 people.

Ishmael Reed: I see.

Kathryn Takara: Yes. I guess that would be...

Ishmael Reed: How were you treated there at Tufts?

Kathryn Takara: That was quite an alienating experience at the time and I only went back fifty years later when they invited me to come back and speak about my experience as a black woman intellectual at Tufts.

Ishmael Reed: Boston is the most racist city in the country.

Kathryn Takara: Boston was quite the challenge.

Ishmael Reed: I thought Boston was the most racist city in the country.

Kathryn Takara: Well I kind of felt that way when I was there. So there were few people of color at Tufts and maybe seven or eight Black people at the university in 1961. Maybe five of them were women. There were only a couple of Black guys and I didn't have a social life really. Anyone who dated me – there was a quarterback who was sweet on me – but there was always so much pressure if anyone dated someone Black that, you know, you were almost forced out of dating and romance. But the teachers were fair. Maybe not as nurturing as it would have been at an HBCU, but you know, I got on.

Then while at Tufts, I began **traveling internationally**. I had an opportunity to go to Africa for the first time when I was a sophomore in 1962, just after the Independence of many African countries, with **Crossroads Africa**, an experimental work program intended to build links between the United States, Canada, and Africa. It was founded by James Herman Robinson and the program became a precursor to the Peace Corps.

Ishmael Reed: Where did you go?

Kathryn Takara: To West Africa (good for my French). It's called now Niger and I was in Niamey but we landed in the Côte d'Ivoire and then drove up through what is now known as Burkina Faso (Upper Volta).

Ishmael Reed: How old were you then?

Kathryn Takara: About eighteen, almost nineteen.

Ishmael Reed: Wow, that is great.

Kathryn Takara: Yes, and then we got to this village area in Niamey and our project was to build a school, a two-room school out of concrete blocks. We made all of our blocks,

using only two molds, out of a heavy mixture of cement, gravel, and sand. The first week, all of our blocks crumbled. Then the African masons came on board and we learned how to do it.

Ishmael Reed: Oh, wow.

Kathryn Takara: But it was very hard work in blazing hot, sub-Saharan desert, the Sahel, with daily temperatures of 120 degrees!

Ishmael Reed: Wow. How many people were there?

Kathryn Takara: There were about 10 in our American group. About three of those were Canadian, and we stayed at a lycee (High School) near the site with African students who really wanted to be home. It was their vacation. But the government said they had to be there to work with us, so they were there living and working with us for over six weeks. In Niger, culture shock was real, but not in foreseen and predicable culture, politics, and economics. For example, the American guys were most put off about the excessive touching between Africans. The Africans were very camaraderie in their touching. The breasts, normally hidden breasts in the West, were unabashed by open and exposed breasts, I'm thinking culture shock. But for me the culture shock was more having to do with the large Islam population. Muslim. And distinguished men had many wives. In fact they wanted to have me as a wife in several places that we went. So it was just a little...different, and flattering to be seen as desirable and beautiful, and not measured by the white aesthetic of beauty.

Ishmael Reed: I have met African women who prefer polygamy.

Kathryn Takara: Yes, well I can see that.

Ishmael Reed: Each woman has a duty and a job and everything and keeping a home.

Kathryn Takara: It's all clear and they have their own little place. But anyway, that was my first time in Africa, and that was after my previous summer in France. My first time abroad was in **France**. Then I went to Africa, West Africa, because I spoke French.

Ishmael Reed: You went to France before you went to Africa?

Kathryn Takara: Yes. I became a French major my sophomore year.

Ishmael Reed: How old were you when you went to France?

Kathryn Takara: I must have been nineteen.

Ishmael Reed: Nineteen? Yes.

Kathryn Takara: In France, I was probably eighteen, and was on a summer abroad program after my freshman year at Tufts, and my mother participated also, although she went to Besançon. I lived with a French family in a small town near the Pyrenees Mountains, and it was the first time I ever felt free from Alabama discrimination and all that over...

Ishmael Reed: What town was this?

Kathryn Takara: Pau, France – located in the southwestern part of the country. But what was interesting and significant was that I felt so liberated! Part of it was surely my imagination, but I felt so liberated compared to my previous experiences in the USA that I decided to become a French major, which I had never previously considered. As I mentioned earlier, I was going to be a doctor like Daddy, but I switched my major from pre-med to French. The following summer, 1963, I went to to Africa. West Africa. I was selected partially because of my French speaking ability as a participant to Crossroads Africa and we built a school. Then the following summer in 1964, after my junior year at Tufts, I got married.

Ishmael Reed: Did you get married in Boston?

Kathryn Takara: Yes, because **interracial marriage** was illegal in Alabama and many areas in the USA. Plus my to-be white husband's father wanted to have him committed to a mental institution.

Ishmael Reed: Because he wanted to be married to you?

Kathryn Takara: Yes, and also...

Ishmael Reed: Catholic?

Kathryn Takara: No, no.

Ishmael Reed: You said a priest.

Kathryn Takara: I use those words interchangeably. Priest, his pastor, I don't know. No, he was not Catholic, he was racist. And then he said he was going to come to our wedding and kill us. So during the service, we had to have people on alert at the door, as guards, at the Episcopal Church.

Ishmael Reed: What nationality was our husband?

Kathryn Takara: The family was White and my mother, my mother was incensed that someone...

Ishmael Reed: What was the nationality of his father? Do you know?

Kathryn Takara: Yes, probably some English, Irish, and German.

Ishmael Reed: Irish?

Kathryn Takara: And German, I don't know, all of the above.

Ishmael Reed: He was going to come and kill you?

Kathryn Takara: That's what he threatened. His mother kept him drunk on the floor. So anyway, that's a whole other story.

Ishmael Reed: And what did your mother...?

Kathryn Takara: My mother was irate. She thought that his father was White trash. His dad in particular. Her...

Tennessee Reed: I think she had a point.

Ishmael Reed: Probably Irish .

Kathryn Takara: My fiancée then husband attended Wesleyan University in Connecticut, but ironically I met him in Alabama during the Civil Rights Movement in 1963.

Ishmael Reed: You and Alice Walker and who else married white during that period?

Kathryn Takara: She was in Mississippi.

Ishmael Reed: Charlene Hunter.

Kathryn Takara: Hunter, yes.

Ishmael Reed: That was a big fear. You know, Abraham Lincoln had to make a speech.

Kathryn Takara: Oh about the intermarriage?

Ishmael Reed: Yes. He had to tell them that Black women weren't going to invade the North and get into bedrooms. Abraham Lincoln, you know.

Kathryn Takara: Hey, we come in so surreptitiously.

Ishmael Reed: So the groom's father threatened to come...

Kathryn Takara: Yes, and my dad was fine. He said, "Let love prevail."

Ishmael Reed: Okay.

Kathryn Takara: But my mother felt that...she was much better than ignorant white folk. My mother had a lot of dignity...

Ishmael Reed: I know. I met her. She had a lot of respect.

Kathryn Takara: She just couldn't stand that someone would be acting like that with her daughter. But anyway, I write about all of that stuff somewhere or other, in my poems.

Ishmael Reed: So that's Karla's father?

Kathryn Takara: That's Karla's father. Yes, and she's taking care of him now from afar and she's taking care of Amhara Hicks. I mention all of that. So, anyway, hopefully she can release some of this stuff and soar into her own wings because she's already doing it.

Ishmael Reed: So then you came to the West after that?

Kathryn Takara: Yes, after a year in **Bordeaux, France. I was the recipient of a Fulbright Fellowship.**

Ishmael Reed: You went to Bordeaux, France?

Kathryn Takara: Yes. In 1965, after graduation from Tufts, I went to France with my new husband for a year. My project was black **literary translation**. I translated West African and Caribbean poetry that was written in French.

Ishmael Reed: Where's that?

Kathryn Takara: It's hanging around.

Ishmael Reed: You never published it?

Kathryn Takara: One or two here or there. I got about thirty of them, mostly unpublished.

Ishmael Reed: You've got to publish them.

Kathryn Takara: Okay. I have to write down a list...

Ishmael Reed: You know Langston Hughes translated some of those poems. As a matter of fact, some of those poems are still getting royalties.

Kathryn Takara: Oh, that's good.

Ishmael Reed: Since 1969.

Kathryn Takara: Yes, see I'm not connected to contemporary literary happenings. I'm really way out in the sticks living in Hawai'i and missing most of the vanguard innovative art scene in the USA. That's the sacrifice that I make for a creative space to write, you know?

Ishmael Reed: Some of the greatest artists never left town.

Kathryn Takara: Well.

Ishmael Reed: Hieronymus Bosch.

Kathryn Takara: Oh, he's wild, unconventional, and surrealistic in his art.

Ishmael Reed: He's one of the reasons I came to Oakland.

Kathryn Takara: Oh, his influence on you?

Ishmael Reed: Well, no, that you can accomplish something uniquely creative from a town like this and not in Manhattan. I was almost killed in Manhattan with affection because, you know, they love Black artists there. They love Black writers in Manhattan. You can get loved to death if you're a Black writer or artist.

Kathryn Takara: Loved into inertia and resting on your laurels?

Ishmael Reed: Hey, that's not for me. I wanted to go to the most barbaric city in the country. I went to Los Angeles. The most barbaric...

Kathryn Takara: Oh. I don't know Los Angeles.

Ishmael Reed: The most barbaric city. But anyway, so you guys went to France...

Kathryn Takara: France and traveled around Europe, and then we went to Berkeley Grad School for our MAs. My husband studied English. I went to study French. That's where I met you.

Ishmael Reed: Yes, I remember meeting you.

Kathryn Takara: In '66-'68.

Ishmael Reed: Yes, I met your husband, too.

Kathryn Takara: Bill. Yes. Because Karla was born. Right. She was born in Berkeley.

Ishmael Reed: Okay, so then. Why did you decide to go to Hawai`i?

Kathryn Takara: Because everything had changed. When we were in Oakland/Berkeley and I was hanging out with Kathleen Cleaver, occasionally some Black Panthers would come over. Our house was kind of a safe house, and we were in between things. So there we were, grad students at Berkeley, and then Karla was born. In the late 1960s there was teargas in the streets in Berkeley. Earlier we had lived in the anti-Vietnam War house and reporters from *Time Magazine* interviewed the people downstairs.

Ishmael Reed: An anti-Vietnam war house?

Kathryn Takara: The first floor was.

Ishmael Reed: Where was that located?

Kathryn Takara: On 62nd Street... or on Delaware in Berkeley. I can't remember. I believe it was on Delaware.

Ishmael Reed: You lived with all of these people?

Kathryn Takara: Oh, yes, but they lived in the basement flat, and we had our own flat.

But anyway, I have another story about Huey Newton. We can talk about that later.

Ishmael Reed: Okay.

Ishmael Reed: So, why did you **move to Hawai`i**?

Kathryn Takara: Well, it was reputed to be a haven for interracial marriages, which we were, and a place of great diversity. With all the demonstrations and clashes between the Panthers, Free Speech Movement, and police teargas and everything, and I had just given birth to our daughter Karla, we decided that we would go out of the country for awhile. So we applied to the Peace Corps and various teaching abroad programs, but Iolani School, an elite private school in Honolulu, on the island of Oahu, came through first, so we decided to accept. At the time, we did not know much about Hawai`i. However, I remember my dad listened to Hawaiian music in the 50s and 60s when he had his veterinary clinic in Morgantown, West Virginia.

Ishmael Reed: Did he like Arthur Godfrey?

Kathryn Takara: I don't know if he liked Arthur Godfrey. He liked Ellington, big bands, and the Hawaiian music.

Ishmael Reed: There used to be this guy on the radio named Arthur Godfrey, who promoted Hawaiian music, and he would wear Hawaiian shirts and he played Hawaiian music on his show.

Kathryn Takara: Oh, I don't remember that.

Ishmael Reed: The music was your connection to Hawai`i, and their reputation for being a haven for interracial marriage.

Kathryn Takara: Well, I didn't have much of a connection, but I do remember when it became a state, and hearing that there were all of these non-White people who lived there as residents, who were tolerant of different ethnic/racial groups. In Tuskegee, we had no idea of a Hawaiian overthrow or loss of sovereignty, or the conditions of Hawaiian people. We Blacks in Alabama were just happy that all of these brown people and dark

people were going to have their own state. I mean, that was our mentality at that time. Of course it has changed now.

So to back up a bit, after the year in Bordeaux, France with my Fulbright Fellowship, my husband and I came to U.C. Berkeley for graduate school. That was an educational and political experience, highlighted by the Black Panther Party experience, the Free Speech Movement, and the Anti-War (Vietnam) Movement. Then we went to Hawai`i and even after we became divorced, my ex-husband, Bill Brundage, moved to Maui and then the Big Island, while I stayed on Oahu. So that was how our marriage ended up. I stayed in Hawai`i because I feel very creative there.

Ishmael Reed: Yes, you produced a lot.

Kathryn Takara: And then I was also teaching French initially and loving it because it's light and easy...

Ishmael Reed: At the university?

Kathryn Takara: No, at Hawai`i Loa College. I applied for a position, but they didn't hire me at the University of Hawai`i. So that was my first obstacle as an outsider (malihini) in Hawai`i. But I was hired and taught at the Windward Community College as a French instructor for over a decade before becoming full time at the University of Hawai`i in Ethnic Studies.

Ishmael Reed: What was the name of that Japanese guy who invited a group of African Americans to Honolulu for **African American Visions**, a humanities festival? You were the Project Director. The director asked me, "How much money do you want?" and I said, "As much as Maya Angelou."

Kathryn Takara: That was Victor Kobayashi.

Tennessee Reed: Was this in 1994?

Kathryn Takara: Must have been '94.

Tennessee Reed: Maya Angelou came early. She came down for a week.

Ishmael Reed: Was she down there? No, Kathryn invited me there.

Tennessee Reed: No, I am saying that we stayed down there longer. She only stayed for a week. We were there for two and a half weeks.

Ishmael Reed: So how'd you get to the University of Hawai`i?

Kathryn Takara: Okay. So I kept being terribly disturbed by the **stereotypes** about Blacks that were prevalent in Hawai`i. For example, one time I was standing in front of the Ilikai Hotel in Honolulu and I was dressed in the style of the day, very short skirt.

Ishmael Reed: This was in Berkeley?

Kathryn Takara: No. This is in Hawai`i. I was standing there waiting for my friend...

Ishmael Reed: What hotel was this again?

Kathryn Takara: This was in Honolulu in 1968 or so at The Ilikai Hotel. And so I'm standing on the steps up to the lobby waiting for a friend and a policeman came up to me, as if I were a prostitute or something, and told me to move on and that just broke any illusions I had about local respect for a black woman.

I decided then, "Okay, I want to teach **Black Studies**. These people are ignorant. They don't know who we are, they don't have any sense of our history," and, you know, I was angry like my mom at that point. Just furious, and plus I had my hair all big in a natural

like Angela Davis. So I started...I proposed with English Bradshaw, a Black man who was helping to propose **Ethnic Studies** in Hawai'i with a Japanese man Franklin Odo.

Ishmael Reed: And he hired you?

Kathryn Takara: English Bradshaw suggested that I write up a proposal for a course in contemporary Black Studies to the Ethnic Studies program.

Ishmael Reed: Oh, I see. Okay.

Kathryn Takara: I wrote a proposal. My proposal was 20th Century Blacks in America, which was accepted and approved. So I taught the course from the turn of the 20th Century, including the Harlem Renaissance, the growth of the Civil Rights Movement in the 40s, 50s, and 60s – periods that I knew and loved.

And then my cousin was killed in 1966, you remember, Sammy Younge Jr., a SNCC worker and college student, who was shot in the head trying to use a White bathroom in downtown Tuskegee.

Ishmael Reed: Sammy who?

Kathryn Takara: **Sammy Younge Jr.**, James Foreman wrote a whole book about him, entitled *Sammy Younge Jr.: The First Black College Student to Die in the Black Liberation Movement*. He was the first college student killed in the **Civil Rights Movement** in Tuskegee, Alabama.

Ishmael Reed: He was shot in the head?

Kathryn Takara: He was shot in the back after an argument. He was demanding to use a White bathroom and he was hot tempered. Always had been. Very high yellow and it, the murder, just...you know Tuskegee just fell apart. Middle class light skinned Black guy, shot. A martyr for Civil Rights.

Ishmael Reed: That's what they said in the Klan. The students rioted in Tuskegee. The Blacks said, "What do we have to do? Here we are, we have these PhD's because we go against these stereotypes. We are high achievers." So getting back to Black women as prostitutes, in 1901 they had a big riot in New York."

Kathryn Takara: Oh, in New York? The biggest black riot that I remember hearing about, although they flared across the country when blacks tried to assert their Civil Rights.

Ishmael Reed: Yes 1,000 people participated in a riot because Black women were considered prostitutes when they were going to Church, and at the same time white supremacists were beating up Jewish people. They said the Jewish/Black alliance began in the '60s? But in fact, it began in 1901 on the basis of police brutality. Jewish people have forgotten about that.

Kathryn Takara: I'm sure you remind them all of the time.

Ishmael Reed: Absolutely. Irish cops went around and beat up people who they thought were Jewish in 1901. So the NAACP and some of the organizations arose because of economic and political disfranchisement, Black women going to Church and the cops...that's interesting. So Sammy Younge.

Kathryn Takara: Sammy Leamon Young, Junior.

Ishmael Reed: And he was murdered.

Kathryn Takara: Yes, he was shot in the back of the head for trying to use a white bathroom. He was to meet his girlfriend at the Greyhound Bus. It was on January 3rd at the bus station and I was studying in France. Mama said he went to the gas station next door which was half as big as this room or this room size, and he said he wanted to go the

bathroom. The man pulled his gun out and said, “Nigger, go out back” or whatever, and Sammy said he was going to tell the police. The police station was like two blocks away, three blocks away, and so the guy pulled out a gun, and that’s when Sammy said he was going to go tell the police. Sam left and reported the incident. The police told him to go back and that they would be down later and then when he got back, the argument continued and escalated. The white man cussed at him, drew his gun, and Sammy ran to the car and got his golf club and the man was after him with the gun, fired into the air, so Sammy ran on the bus as it pulled into the station. The man ran onto the bus with the gun and the bus driver said, “You can’t do that! Everybody’s watching,” because you know it was after Dr. King, the freedom rides, and SNCC were protesting, and TV cameras were finally documenting Civil Rights abuses.

Ishmael Reed: This was Tuskegee?

Kathryn Takara: This was in Tuskegee in 1966. The beginning. So everyone on the bus heard the guy say, “You can’t do that!” So the White guy was put off the bus and Sammy was put off and Sammy started to run away from Mr. Segrest. At that point he shot him in the head and killed him. It took the police a good two hours to get down to the bus station. Most Black residents of Tuskegee went down there as the news spread. Sammy was spread out on the ground in a big puddle of blood and the police came two hours later. So that radicalized a lot of people, who were otherwise non-confrontational.

Ishmael Reed: What happened to the guy? He got off?

Kathryn Takara: Oh, yes. He spent one night in jail and then he was found innocent a year later. I mean this police brutality and all this violence and abuse by the police against black people dates back as far as I can remember. I’ve read about it since slavery, but I mean in my personal experiences, I have lots of primary documentation on the events.

Ishmael Reed: What other horrifying things happened in **the South**?

Kathryn Takara: That I know about?

Ishmael Reed: That affected you personally?

Kathryn Takara: Well this didn’t necessarily affect me personally in a direct way, but we had a woman, “help” if you will, who came in daily and did the washing, ironing, cleaning, cooking, and babysitting (me). Her name was Annie, and I’ve written a short story about her that has not been published, and she would always be talking about stuff that was happening in her life. She lived out in the country, you know, and picked cotton in her early years. She had said that they finally found Old Man Brown, he wasn’t old, but all of his limbs had been cut off and of course his penis had also been cut off and that was not an everyday occurrence, but you would hear about these terrible mutilations in the countryside occurring outside of Tuskegee. I can remember in my own memory again the Klan burning a cross at the intersection across the highway by my house. I can remember that night and it was just terrifying.

Ishmael Reed: So you think the South has changed now?

Kathryn Takara: Yes, I think it’s changed and I think it hasn’t changed. It’s just like the country. There are still a lot of racists but there are also a lot of people who have moved forward toward a more tolerant attitude and behavior of democracy and equality.

Ishmael Reed: These days, Mississippi and Alabama have the largest amount of elected Black officials.

Kathryn Takara: Probably.

Ishmael Reed: In the whole country. Mississippi and Alabama.

Kathryn Takara: Probably because they have black majorities in those states.

Ishmael Reed: Back to **Hawai`i**. They're probably trying to change political ideologies and representatives, though with this current president in power. When did you first hear about this **false nuclear alert** in Hawai`i?

Kathryn Takara: It was early in the morning and I was sleeping. My husband was in the living room and he came into the bedroom in a disturbed fashion and said, "You've got to come see this!" I said, "Well, what is it?" He said, "There's this warning that there's going to be a missile attack any time. It's incoming." I said, "What?" He said, "Come see this," so I went and it was this...oh, oh, and there was this noise, this warning, alert, so that was strange and he continued to watch and I walked out on the deck and you can see out to the ocean and all the greenery and then I thought, "Well, if it's going to come, it's going to come," so I walked on the top deck and then he came up there and we just stood in silence. I mean, in Hawai`i there are usually no basements or nuclear shelters, or places to hide. Although, the general theory is that if they send a bomb in, it's going to be on the Honolulu side, where most of the military installations are located.

Ishmael Reed: Was there anybody running in the streets? Your neighbors?

Kathryn Takara: No, I live in the country.

Ishmael Reed: I know, but there are houses around you.

Kathryn Takara: Yes. We have fairly large lots, but no one was running or panicked.

Ishmael Reed: You moved?

Kathryn Takara: No, it's the same place.

Ishmael Reed: No? Because I remember it as a community.

Kathryn Takara: There is a community, but no one I saw was running, but, when we went back to see the TV, then you could see all of the people in Honolulu panicked. Especially those who were outside, at the beach, on a walk, unprotected. One person was putting his daughter down a manhole, people were jumping in their cars trying to leave town. They didn't know if they were supposed to go up in the apartment buildings, get away, or what to do. I mean, the hotels and businesses are in Honolulu too, so it was a lot of chaos. A lot of chaos, and it took twenty minutes for them to correct it on the air that this siren was a false alarm. I think there is a backside to the story.

Ishmael Reed: People thought this was it.

Kathryn Takara: People thought this was it.

Ishmael Reed: People thought that they were going to die.

Kathryn Takara: People thought they were going to die and they were calling their relatives and saying, "This may be the last time you're going to hear from me."

Ishmael Reed: Oh my goodness.

Kathryn Takara: I know. So it was quite a turbulent twenty minutes and then of course who's to blame? So then there came the whole big blaming game and there's still not accountability. They Civil Defense wouldn't divulge the guy's name initially who pushed the disaster alert button. They tried to protect him. And apparently there were choices that the operator could have made. And initially, it was not clear that this was a test. The message read "BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT. INBOUND TO HAWAII. SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS IS NOT A DRILL." So when the alert announced it was

an error, people were very angry. Civil defense workers were getting death threats I think because of what had happened and how upset everyone had been. And so finally they fired that person, and I think that head of the department finally, was removed.

Ishmael Reed: Is there tension there still? Because it might happen.

Kathryn Takara: I think there's less. But I think that many people hold onto a kind of subtext that Hawai'i is dispensable. That we are out in the middle of the Pacific, that we are not essential and perhaps not "real" Americans. Well maybe there's a majority of Whites, but only by so much. But if you add all of the ethnic groups together there are more brown, dark people than there are Whites. And perhaps we are all seen as dispensable in a national disaster.

Ishmael Reed: People in Hawai'i will be given the Puerto Rican treatment.

Kathryn Takara: Right. So I think that would be it. There would not be the security or concern that there might be in a state like Louisiana or California.

Ishmael Reed: They're saying that...they said they were going to be making a separate deal that as long as you don't attack us, the United States, that you could do what you wanted to do over there. I mean, they're going to kiss Japan and China goodbye. Or Japan and South Korea. That's what this deal's all about. You can keep your weapons, but don't bother us. Lindsey Graham is saying if it's going to happen, it's going to happen over there, because they believe yellow life is expendable, too.

Kathryn Takara: Oh, I know.

Ishmael Reed: Eisenhower said that they (Asians) don't care nothin' about life. He said they were termites.

Kathryn Takara: I think I've heard something like that before. That same dialogue goes on to this very day. What have they been calling them?

Ishmael Reed: Gooks.

Kathryn Takara: Yes.

Ishmael Reed: Animals.

Kathryn Takara: Animals. So I think we're living, what I started to say in the beginning, in more turbulent times.

Ishmael Reed: No, these people would rather die than give up **White Supremacy**.

Kathryn Takara: That's the truth.

Ishmael Reed; They showed that during the Civil War. That they were going to sacrifice thousands of people to maintain that. So every time they took to the battlefield with White Supremacy, millions of people would die. I can't say that here. I get my Op-Eds published in *Haaretz*, an Israeli newspaper and *El Pais* in Spain. I can't say that here.

Kathryn Takara: Israel has just been so horrible. They're kicking out how many Africans? 20,000?

Ishmael Reed: Well, that's the government. That's Netanyahu.

Kathryn Takara: Netanyahu. Oh, he's terrible.

Ishmael Reed: He may be in jail soon.

Kathryn Takara: I have not liked him from the beginning. I really haven't liked him.

Ishmael Reed: The Americans made him. The American Jews from New York.

Tennessee Reed: Americans made a lot of these people.

Ishmael Reed: The thing is we can go to their countries...

Kathryn Takara: And disrupt their elections...

Ishmael Reed: And choose who the leader is. Anyway, it's going to be interesting times.
Kathryn Takara: It is interesting times and it's just...I don't know. Do you think that we can recover our fledgling democracy?

Ishmael Reed: I think the Republicans will take it back to white privilege and supremacy.

Kathryn Takara: You think so?

Ishmael Reed: I think so. The Democrats don't have any fight.

Kathryn Takara: Well we'll see what happens.