

Transcript of Interview with Zita Cup Choy (March 5, 2014)

Do you think the Hawaiian government and the Board of Health acted ethically in enacting and enforcing the 1865 Act to Prevent the Spread of Leprosy?

Considering the state of medical knowledge about leprosy and the epidemics that decimated the Hawaiian population in the decades leading up to the 1865 act the government was acting to protect the community and perhaps also protect those diagnosed with the disease from violence at the hands of neighbors.

Or was it within the government's right and responsibility to enforce the medical isolation of those afflicted with Hansen's Disease?

The Kingdom government and the ali'i prior to the arrival of Captain Cook had a responsibility to consider the well-being of the entire community. Decisions are always made based on the knowledge available at that point in time, the resources available and what is known called in several professions as 'best practices'.

Hindsight is always 20/20 and to second guess decisions made by governments or for that matter our kupuna, decisions for their immediate family members, is not fair to the memory of those individuals. The Kingdom's government was reacting to a fear that the entire population might be infected and die if those diagnosed weren't isolated.

What rights do you think were violated for the patients?

To be with family, to earn a living, to live in the community where they have friends and a support system, to have a say in their treatment.

For Molokai residents to raise their children who were born at Kalaupapa. For the children born in Kalaupapa to be raised by their biological parents.

If the government didn't separate those afflicted with the disease, what do you think would have been the best alternative in containing Hansen's Disease?

Unlike the smallpox epidemic that Princess Liliuokalani contained in 1881 by quarantining patients until they were no longer contagious there was not (until the bacteria that causes leprosy and how it is spread was discovered in the 20th century) any idea about how to prevent the spread of the disease or an alternative treatment choice.

There were instances in which skin rashes were misdiagnosed as leprosy causing transport to Molokai of individuals who were not afflicted. An alternative policy would have been to isolate on Oahu those thought to have had the disease, establish a waiting period so that someone who has a rash due to an allergy are not misdiagnosed and transported. Peter Kaeo (Queen Emma's cousin) was sent to Molokai and later released due to a misdiagnosis.

Do you think the American government or the state government learned anything from the history of this settlement or the perspectives of the patients?

We did and we didn't. Fear expressed by your constitutions can be a powerful motivation that causes governments to make decisions that replicated the decisions of the Kingdom of 1865. For an example look for the case of Ryan White, a hemophilic who was HIV positive.

Lastly, if you have any additional comments you'd like to share about your opinion of the settlement and its political and social impact in Hawai'i's history, please feel free to share.

The state did not act in a compassionate or ethical manner when it attempted to shut down Kahi Mohalu in the 1970s-80s. This is not the Kahi Mohalu apartments that exist today but the

Hospital/residence for patients who had lived on Molokai who had moved to Oahu for better access to medical care. The Department of Health made an arbitrary decision to evict and tear down aging structures when a compromise after discussion with the residents would have been a more compassionate solution.