

# State of Aloha

DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKER ANNE MISAWA  
TALKS ABOUT HER LATEST PROJECT



THURSDAY, AUGUST 27 | 7:30PM

Anne Misawa is the Producer/Director of the statehood documentary scheduled to premiere Thursday, August 27 at 7:30PM – part of a 2-hour special, **Insights on PBS Hawaii Presents *State of Aloha***.

The documentary was made by the University of Hawaii's Academy of Creative Media (ACM). Ms. Misawa grew up in Hawaii and came back for a teaching position which she says, “came hand in hand with directing this research project.” The students collaborated with other professional mentors throughout production. She added, “there were dedicated professionals

who put in a lot of time because they understood the importance of the project and that the story needed to be told.”

Ms. Misawa told PBS Hawaii the documentary's title comes from a March 13, 1959 sermon given by Reverend Abraham Akaka:

*“The fears Hawaii may have are to be met by men and women who are living witnesses of what we really are in Hawaii, of the spirit of Aloha, men and women who can help unlock the doors to the future by the guidance and grace of God. This kind of self-affirmation is the need of the*

*hour. And we can affirm our being, as the Aloha State, by full participation in our nation and in our world. For any collective anxiety, the answer is collective courage.”*

**PBSH:** How did ACM students become involved in “State of Aloha”? How many students worked on this project over what period of time?

**MISAWA:** The research project, then titled simply, “The Hawaii Statehood Project,” started in 2004 and actually includes quite a bit of research and documentation that goes

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Join host Dan Boylan and the **INSIGHTS** panel for a live discussion immediately following the premiere of *State of Aloha*.

Visit [pbs-hawaii.org](http://pbs-hawaii.org) for a photo gallery and more information on *State of Aloha*.

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From left, social activist Ah Quon McElrath, former Governor George Ariyoshi, writer Stephanie Launui.

beyond this *State of Aloha* one hour piece. Our first batch of interviews involved about 30 key interviewees in the 2004 summer, ranging from Senator Daniel Inouye to Don Ho to Bumpy Kanahale, etc. We had students work alongside professional mentors on all aspects of production ever since.

There has been a tremendous amount of students involved since 2004. There are students who were involved in research and production of their documentary shorts on the statehood topic within the classroom setting, as well as students involved in the documentary on a volunteer basis.

**PBSH:** Was it really intended to be strictly a research project? Why?

**MISAWA:** Yes, the funding is from a General Services Administration grant, (a federal grant) intended for research. ACM pitched a research topic on Hawaii statehood culminating in documentation that would result in a documentary format video project that could be used for educational distribution.

**PBSH:** What were the biggest challenges in telling the story behind Hawaii's statehood?

**MISAWA:** There was no focus or approach

mandated by the source of the grant. We were free to explore the topic as we saw fit. It's such a huge endeavor that it was quite intimidating trying to figure out what aspect of Hawaii statehood we should focus on, what to research and explore and document, and what would be included and what would have to be shifted out of this final *State of Aloha* video documentary project.

The topic in itself could easily be a miniseries. Trying to edit a cohesive hour-long story, while trying to be respectful and comprehensive of all the various viewpoints, was one of the hardest challenges.

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From left, Dodie Brown and Cultural Specialist Pat Namaka Bacon, actor Jason Scott Lee, former Governor Bill Quinn and wife Nancy Quinn.

Filmmaking, I find, is always a compromise weighed by practicalities and involves a recognition that we can't often include everything that we want to or should.

As we worked and researched, it became clear that it would be important to show in *State of Aloha* the historical steps towards statehood for Hawaii, the motivating forces that wanted or did not want statehood, as well as address some of the legacy of statehood and allow expression for some of the current dialogue. What interested me as a filmmaker especially was this opportunity to be able to put to film and archive personal narratives of many of our kupuna. Since our interviews, some have passed away. Having the issues resonate out of personal narratives impacted the students, and they were able to recognize what a wealth of experience and perspectives their immediate surroundings hold for them. Many of the students worked on their own personal

documentary shorts and segments and interviewed a lot of their own family and community members.

**PBSH:** Now that the program is completed, what do the students think about the finished product? What do you think they learned from becoming so involved in the history behind Hawaii's statehood?

**MISAWA:** What I have heard from students over and over is that they were surprised by this or that element of history, that they were not aware of earlier, especially those who were illuminated to the various civil rights struggles in Hawaii that led to some of the motivations for statehood.

Students have often come to the topic with very strong opinions on Hawaii's statehood (and issues of sovereignty), sometimes placing the blame of the current problems in Hawaii on statehood itself, while not often

having a lot of informed historical context to their opinions. This process of examining the history from personal narratives of witnesses and academics allowed them a more well-rounded insight into what the motivations were for people in Hawaii towards statehood, and also against it, as well as being able to recognize the complexity of its legacy and the issues surrounding the current dialogue of statehood and sovereignty. Hawaii has such a vivid history. Today part of what it means to live together in these islands is to experience our diversity – even the current discourse over Hawaii's statehood. We wanted to illustrate that richness of history and perspective in this film. It is important to be respectful of the people who met and continue to meet the “great hopes” and “silent fears” that are the challenges of statehood. Challenges so many met with courage and a “state of aloha.”