Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness & Hi'ilei Julia Kawehipuaakahaopulani Hobart

JVN [00:00:00] Welcome to Getting Curious. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and every week I sit down for a gorgeous conversation with a brilliant expert to learn all about something that makes me curious. This episode, y'all, is so freaking amazing. It's so good, it's on the most interesting topic ever. Ah! On today's episode, I'm joined by Hi'ilei Julia Kaweipuaakahaopulani Hobart, where I ask her: What's the cold, hard truth about ice in Hawai'i? Welcome to Getting Curious. Have we got an exciting episode for you, honey. Today we are taking a cold, hard look at how ice became embedded within Hawai'i's foodscape and what this history reveals about colonial relationships to the tropics. So let's welcome to the show our guest, Hi'ilei Julia Hobart, who is an Assistant Professor of Native and Indigenous Studies at Yale University. An interdisciplinary scholar, she researches and teaches on issues of settler colonialism, environment, and Indigenous sovereignty. In her new book, *Cooling the Tropics Ice, Indigeneity, and Hawaiian Refreshment*, she explores the social history of ice water refrigeration in Hawai'i from chilled drinks and sweets to machinery. Ah! How are you, Hi'ilei?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:01:15] I am so well. Thank you for having me today.

JVN [00:01:18] So congratulations on your new book, by the way.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:01:21] Thank you.

JVN [00:01:22] Yes! So your book is premised on the idea that, quote, "While temperature is measurable," quote, "cold is subjective." Can you explain that distinction for us?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:01:32] Yeah, I can! When I started to dive into the world of freshness and refreshment, one of the things that I noticed was that, well, we've known for a really long time how to measure temperature. The language that we've come up with to talk about temperature becomes relative to our own bodies, really the way that we feel in the world. So the way that we talk about cold is relative and it's socially learned. The feelings and affects that we attach to temperature reflect particular social values that have been developed over time. An example of that is for Native Hawaiians, sometimes when we talk about coolness, we are talking about passion, right, things that the Western world very often attaches to heat. This reveals not only the ways that we think about temperature, as, like, a normative quality, but also things that we find pleasurable, delicious, relaxing. These are all values that become attached to the body.

JVN [00:02:39] So does that mean, like, if you're from a place that's, like, super cold, like, you wouldn't think that, like, being cold is, like, as fierce because you're, like,"Ugh, it's fucking cold all the time." Whereas if you're from a place that's, like, really hot, you're, like, "Ooh, I like, like colder stuff because, like, it's never, like, cold here." Is that, like, an example?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:02:58] Yeah, I would say that's part of it. Or also what you think is being, like, a totally normal way to feel. So those of us that grew up in warm climates, like, it's kind of not a big thing to us. For folks whose heritage is from really cold places, right, those values are different than somebody that might walk outside and say, "Oh my God, it's fucking cold out."

JVN [00:03:19] [CHUCKLES] Okay. So what other, like, thermal language should we keep in mind as we dive in?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:03:24] Some of the thermal language that I lean on heavily in this book are concepts of freshness and refreshment, freshness as a way of thinking about the cold chain and things like freezing and refrigeration technologies that we don't necessarily think of in terms of, like, bodily pleasure and enjoyment, *but* refrigeration and refreshment become really subtly interlocked and developed across time.

JVN [00:03:52] Ah, I mean. I do love a good cold cocktail on a hot day, though. It's nice to, like, but it's not, I know, I bet we're going to a place that's like…

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:04:03] That's our colonized relationship to the tropics!

JVN [00:04:08] I know. I hate it. I don't like it, I know, it's like, oh, God…

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:04:11] Every time I have a cocktail I feel so guilty, now I wrote a whole book knowing about what it means.

JVN [00:04:18] Okay, so, like, where does the ice freeze naturally in Hawai'i?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:04:25] So ice will freeze naturally in Hawai'i, mostly seasonally but sometimes unseasonally, at the summits of some of our tallest mountains. Hawai'i has fantastically tall mountains, so snow will fall most commonly on Mauna Kea, sometimes on Mauna Loa, and occasionally on Haleakalā. So Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa are on Hawai'i Island, commonly known as the Big Island. Haleakalā is on the island of Maui. So really at our tallest summits.

JVN [00:04:56] So what's the significance of these sites for Indigenous communities?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:05:01] One of the places that it's become really significant in contemporary Indigenous politics in Hawai'i comes out of a longstanding resistance to the development of the summit of Mauna Kea for scientific and astronomical research. But historically, Hawaiians talked about ice and the cold frequently in our stories, our 'ōlelo, which are basically storied histories of place. Even though these spaces were very often restricted to royalty, to really important cultural practitioners, while Hawaiians didn't typically summit mountains into cold places, we talked about it and thought about it all of the time. This

becomes significant because once Westerners start to arrive in Hawai'i and go off to explore things and measure things and do all of the activities that colonialists like to do when they're in new places, they started to imagine that the summit spaces were empty spaces that were ripe for the taking. And Native Hawaiians instead belonged along the shoreline. And we can see the development of these ideas as the tourism industry emerges, wherein Native Hawaiians became service workers, became Beach Boys, became objects of sexual fantasy. Right. This is the kind of work that Hawaiians were thought to do in the places that Hawaiians were thought to belong. And summit spaces became these "empty" spaces for Western imagination and development. And this starts to really underpin ideas about what Hawai'i is for, right, what purposes that it serves. And Hawai'i eventually comes to be imagined as a place that is a playground, that is a racial laboratory, that is a space for global science. These all have to do with accumulated knowledges about topography and territory and environment.

JVN [00:07:08] Mm. So when did that start?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:07:13] we've got late 1700s, early contact. Captain James Cook. And this kind of starts to slowly bring folks to Hawai'i's shores by the early 1800s. By maybe the 1830s or 1840s, the floodgates open. The Western world is showing up on Hawai'i's doorstep. And this starts to change everything.

JVN [00:07:39] What political and social changes were happening? Like, was the Hawaiian cause? Like, was Hawai'i, like, governed by, like, the royal family at the time?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:07:46] So Hawai'i has a relatively new monarchy in the 1800s. And the story about that monarchy is a little bit complicated because of the way that Hawai'i begins to model itself off of Western politics. Part of the reason why this happens is because Hawai'i's, like, jockeying for legitimacy on the world stage, right? So if you can fashion yourself as a "civilized," "legitimate" nation state, you protect yourself from colonial infringement, right? You protect yourself from imperial powers coming in and trying to take over. So this starts to roll out across the kind of the middle part of the 19th century where constitutions are being developed, where private property land holdings starts to emerge as a concept that is opposite to communal land holdings that basically dictated how Hawaiians lived before. So the city's landscape evolves in accordance with changes in governance. The material infrastructure of the city. And also the social fabric, including ideas about religion and commerce.

JVN [00:09:04] So America's global ice trade touches down in Hawai'i in the 1850s. Can you set the scene for us of what life was like in Honolulu at that time? Like, who was living there?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:09:14] Yeah, big changes for Honolulu in 1850. 1850 is the year that Honolulu becomes designated as the capital city of Hawai'i. Before that, it was Lahaina, Maui. Kamehameha The Great, King Kamehameha I, moves the government seat to the port town of Hawai'i. At that time, it was maybe 100 or so Native Hawaiian households, something that we

might think of today as a village. And then in the next ten years or so, we have buildings popping up, made out of lumber imported from the Pacific Northwest. We have whaling ships filling the harbor. We've got the harbor being widened and deepened in order to accommodate trade. We have missionaries coming and all kinds of religious ideas about sexual expression and civility and piety becoming embedded into the social fabric. So we have this huge explosion of foreign ideas, foreign goods, and foreign commerce that is reshaping the city and expanding it enormously.

JVN [00:10:26] So it's, like, basically, like, this monarchy was governing, but, like, even that existence of that monarchy was, like, all kind of being shaped by, like, what was going on at the time, which was, like, rapid expanding and, like, the United States and, like, all of those like Western powers were, like, jockeying for land all over the place, like at the time. So that, I think, that makes sense. So how did American ice then end up in Hawai'i and, like, how is it received? Because it's like a really long boat ride, I feel like…

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:10:56] It took a lot of effort to get ice around the globe. The American ice trade deserves a whole podcast on its own because it's super fucking fascinating. This guy Frederic Tudor, he basically dominates the American ice trade across the 19th century. He develops technologies for insulating ice in the hulls of ships such that he could minimize ice melt. So he's harvesting pond water from the American northeast in Massachusetts and Maine. Typically, he's using sawdust as just a byproduct of the Maine lumber industry, packing everything in and sending it off in ships across the world. The majority of the ice trade goes to cool down sweltering British colonialists who are in Bombay and Calcutta and really desiring a nice cold drink. Speculative shipments go off to South America, to the Caribbean, to the American South. And some of it goes to Hawai'i. Not a ton of it goes to Hawai'i. But to get ice to Hawai'i from the East Coast required going all the way down the East Coast of South America, around the Cape Horn, back up to San Francisco, which was a major port at that time. And then across the Pacific Ocean to Hawai'i.

JVN [00:12:21] Holy shit.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:12:23] Probably took at least 3 to 6 months.

JVN [00:12:26] Yeah!

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:12:28] And I think they lost a fair bit of that ice to melt. But what really blows my mind about these particular shipments and these journeys is that you kind of think that they would be going through all of this effort to preserve something, right? To keep maybe a particular product cold and fresh on the way across. No, they were going there to make cocktails.

JVN [00:12:55] That fucking Tudor man. I bet he was a dick. So that's happening to cool everyone down and give them cocktails. It's basically, like, cooling down all the oppressors, like, of the world. The ice trade. Um…. so great!

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:13:11] That's the way to put it. Yeah, you could, you could put it that way. So it's basically arriving speculatively.

JVN [00:13:19] What's that mean again?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:13:21] That means folks are sending ice across thinking that there might be a market. But not having previously established a market for these particular products.

JVN [00:13:33] And they're, like, "Hey, if you want some of this?" How did that commerce work? Like, was the first one free or something?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:13:39] Two stories that I can tell in regards to that. First, Tudor, when he first came up with this business idea, he was trying to send it down to places in the Caribbean, particularly Cuba, and sending it to, like, bars and saloons to be served. And actually nobody had developed a taste for it yet, and nobody particularly was interested in having cold drinks. So he had to bribe bartenders to automatically start putting it in people's drinks and did that for several months before folks developed a taste for it. So we have these ideas that, like, it's inherently refreshing to have these things, but it was actually a learned social practice and he had to bribe people to start to like it. The way that it goes to Hawai'i in these ships, as part of these speculative markets, is that ships are bringing so many goods to the East Coast from abroad, everything from fruits to whale products, to whatever they're going off around the world to bring back. Right. They have full ships coming home. They don't want to send empty ships going out. They want to figure out some way to turn a profit on the outgoing shipment. So, you harvest ice, you pack it in. If you sell it, great. If you don't or if you lose some, no harm, no foul, because you were heading there with an empty ship anyway.

JVN [00:15:12] Mmm. Okay, that makes sense. So does that mean that they, like, wanted to get stuff back from Hawai'i to take to go sell?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:15:21] Hawai'i is basically sitting at the crossroads of the Pacific. So ships would stop there to refuel supplies. Seamen would go on leave and get their yayas out, whatever their, whatever it was. And so ships were bringing things back from Hawai'i itself, but also from all of the places that were bringing in goods to Honolulu as a port.

JVN [00:15:50] So how would people, like, consume ice? Was it, like, all alcoholic beverages or was there, like, iced water or, like, ice cream or, like, cold beverages that weren't liquor?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:16:02] Yeah. So ice kind of shows up to this particular social landscape of elite businessmen, of Native Hawaiian royalty, to seamen who are on the ice. I'm such a child. Every time I say seamen, I can't.

JVN [00:16:21] I've been laughing too, every time on the inside. And I'm like, Focus. Because when you said it the first time, I was, like, "Oh my God, why are you talking about that?" And then I was like, Oh, God, I'm, like, word sailors. I'm obsessed. And seaman is, like, fun to say. So, yeah, we're just doing that!

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:16:33] Yeah! Because of the missionary influence as well, we have all of this piety that overlays the social fabric of Hawai'i. So ice gets consumed in alcoholic drinks. But that consumption is restricted essentially to white businessmen and Hawaiian elites, though there are laws against Native Hawaiians consuming alcohol. And then we have the sailors who are on leave that are looking for a good time. They can't afford to go in the bars and saloons to have iced cocktails right, they're drinking room temperature booze. And then we have the missionaries who are expressing their piety with drinking ice cold water, right, so that they have this kind of, like, bracing, pure refreshment that gives them some matter of indulgence, but not boozy indulgence.

JVN [00:17:41] Would a woman not be pious if she drank alcohol because that made her, like, a big old slut or something so, like, no women could drink alcohol and be pious or something?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:17:50] Correct. Booze is only for "loose" women.

JVN [00:17:54] Got it, got it. And then for men, it's, like, if you can hold your drink, you can be pious and you have, like, one or two. But if you're, like, a big old sloppy drunk, then that's not pious either. Or if you, like, cheat on your wife or something. Or did they just, like, not really give a fuck for men?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:18:06] I think if you're a religious guy, you're not drinking alcohol either.

JVN [00:18:10] Oh. So it's only, like, businessmen who were, like, modern day slags. But in 1850?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:18:18] Yeah. The cosmopolitans of that time.

JVN [00:18:22] Okay, I got it. So as it arrives to Hawai'i, like, does ice cream get popular? Do these more, like, European, like, Western ideas of food start to become popular?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:18:31] Yeah, they do. Ice cream becomes massively popular. I mean, it still is, but it became a really important form of refreshment in Hawai'i from maybe the 1870s through to the 1920s. Right. If you were a child or a woman who was social, ice cream was the thing that you could consume for refreshment that reinforced your purity and your chastity.

JVN [00:19:01] Oh, really?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:19:03] Because it's, like, cold and white. And there are all of these imaginings about, you know, dairy and milk that get kind of triangulated across, like, femininity and your ability to be desirable and appropriate.

JVN [00:19:20] Gross, why are humans so basic? In the words of Anna Delvey. Because, like, refrigeration and refreshment and that, like, relationship keeps coming up. And as we talk about this more, I'm, like, really, like, understanding more. What was, like, refreshing beforehand? Was it, like, some gorgeous fruit or, like, jumping in the ocean?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:19:40] We're an island people, we're a water people, you know. Jumping in the ocean, jumping in gorgeous mountain streams, all of that, like, prime refreshment.

JVN [00:19:50] Love it. Just, like, in the, okay, I'm obsessed. Okay, so, we know that, like, your, like, piousness and, like, purity and, like, these ideas of, like, civility are all really racialized and related to, like, colonialism. So, like, is there any other ways that, like, this consumption of ice is, like, mapped on to the idea of, like, racialized, like, civility and, like, Western civility?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:20:15] I think that has to do with the alcohol industry, right? So there were these ideas that Native folks shouldn't drink because they were prone to drunkenness. They couldn't hold their liquor. Right? It was only white men that had the "self-control" to consume alcohol, but not let that alcohol consume them.

JVN [00:20:39] So you write in the 1850s, ice in Hawai'i "inspired visions of plantation futures for would-be colonialists who measured white leisure against Black and brown labor" and quote "placed thermal comfort at the heart of such colonial imaginaries." Can you break down this idea for us? It's so important, and I want to make sure listeners understand it.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:21:01] Yeah. So one of the things that I've thought about with cocktails, particularly in this time period, is that the consumption of cold, alcoholic drinks really got attached to ideas of leisure and implicitly, and adversely, ideas about race and labor. So if we think about the plantation industry, ice and ice drinks come to refresh the plantation overseer, but not the plantation laborer. And a lot of ideas about Blackness and brownness, at that time, were correlated to who was best "adapted" to work in the hot sun and who was best "adapted" to sit in the shade, have a drink and oversee that work.

JVN [00:21:47] [SOUND OF DISGUST] So that's the ways that, like, eugenics, and, like, evolution was, like, mapped onto, like, people. And that was also the same ideology that said that, like, women were best evolved to, like, have babies and like not work and like stay in the house and, like, was just so misogynistic and, like, also, like, the violence of the gender binary like also comes from, like, these same schools of thought. So yeah, that's major and thank you

for clarifying that for us. What about, like, slavery and, like, Hawai'i's like past? Because it's, like, like, I'm just never really thinking about, like, that kind of history. So did, like, Hawai'i have, like, a stance on that? Were they, like, "Don't do that here"? Like for, like the people that were coming from North America or was, like, what was the deal?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:22:29] in the middle of the 1800s, Hawai'i's sugar plantation economy starts to really boom. And Hawai'i didn't have chattel slavery, but it did have indentured labor. So those indentured laborers came from a lot of places in Asia. It came from Portugal. They tried to experiment with a group of Norwegians at one point. They were really pulling labor from all around the world, not under the framework of slavery, but simultaneously imported a lot of those same racialized ideas about labor under the hot sun that become attached to the plantation space.

JVN [00:23:13] Let's look to the 1870s and 1880s in Honolulu. Who now had access to ice? And for what uses, like, beyond refreshment was ice being used? Like, did it become, like, more common and, like, more available?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:23:25] Yeah, it did. So ice becomes shipped to Hawai'i in the 1850s and 1860s. It stops being shipped, and by the 1870s, not very much time later, freezing and refrigeration technology starts to emerge. So rudimentary ice making machines arrive on Hawai'i's shores with a bunch of inventors and folks that are experimenting with ice machines for a lot of different reasons. Those small machines become more refined and more reliable, and it expands pretty quickly into ice factories. And once you get those ice factories and that kind of output, it starts to democratize access to ice, such that people are not only consuming it with more regularity, but they are also getting ice delivered to their homes for refrigeration.

JVN [00:24:16] Mmmm! So how did that, like, switch to machine-made ice that's, like, locally made and stuff. Like, how did that change Hawai'i's physical landscape?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:24:26] I would say that it, it begins to reflect Hawai'i's physical landscapes. So we've got increased urbanization. We've got massive infrastructural development, the expansion of road systems. We have the very first glimmers of suburbanism that start to happen. There are people that are living a little bit further away from the city center. And so it kind of gets inserted into this technology boom that really characterizes the 1870s and 1880s in Hawai'i.

JVN [00:25:02] And then socially, like, ice becomes more, like, democratized, more available to people, like, enters people's, like, daily life more at this time. How does the Hawaiian monarchy react to this new ice technology and uses and also, like, what does that do to the political landscape?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:25:15] So the Hawaiian royalty have already been kind of out on the world stage for several decades and are traveling globally. I'm going to have to go back and

double check when Kalākaua comes into power but he comes into power in the 1870s. He's a monarch who loves technology. He's a tech guy. And he's traveling around the world in the 1880s. He's meeting with inventors in America and Europe. He is super fascinated by Thomas Edison's incandescent light bulb, and he recruits these technologies to come back to Hawai'i and modernize the city. So this is actually a huge point of pride for Native Hawaiians that our palace had electricity and plumbing and telephones before the White House and Buckingham Palace. We were cutting edge.

JVN [00:26:11] Ah! That's fucking cool. What did, like, the people who weren't in the royal family or, like, that hierarchy in Hawai'i think about all of that, like, was there people, like, all over the map? Like, some were like, "Yes!" And some were, like, "Get the fuck out of here!" Like, was it just all over the map?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:26:26] I think that it was a pretty complicated intersection of nationalist pride and also anxiety about Western encroachment.

JVN [00:26:36] Okay. So yes. And so then how did that moment lead to—or does it lead to—like, a hierarchy of taste in Hawai'i?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:26:45] It does, and it really happens through this clash of Western tastes and cosmopolitan ideas of consumption with Indigenous foodways and Native Hawaiian politics of consumption. So we have the way that Native Hawaiians had always eaten without freezing and refrigeration. Fishing, growing, if you don't have a refrigerator, you're not going to be hanging onto your fish for days on end. Right. You are eating things that are freshly harvested, all of the time, at room temperature, generally speaking. Or you're cooking things, you know, you're eating things hot. And then we've got these Western ideas of coldness and purity and refreshment. And so we have Native Hawaiian foods that are sour and salty. Room temperature kinds of things. And then we've got these Western prized tastes that are sweet and cold that, right, kind of butt up against, like, the tepid and the salty and the sour.

JVN [00:27:53] So do people still like, like, all of it or did that just think, make, for, like, a cool, like fusion?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:28:00] I think it depends on what class you were, what race you were. What your daily life looks like.

JVN [00:28:10] Because not everyone had access to that cold stuff.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:28:12] Right. It's mostly democratized, but it's not it's not like how today everybody's got a refrigerator or two hanging out in the basement. Right. It's still relatively classed. And it's how people perform their class. Right. If you have these cold, sweet things, you are indicating to the world that you can afford it, that you have cosmopolitan taste, that you are chic.

JVN [00:28:39] So ice was, like, the Chanel bag of the 1870s.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:28:44] Yeah. Maybe a little bit less expensive than Chanel. Let's see, what's, like, the next hair down?

JVN [00:28:50] Like having, like, a Lexus.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:28:52] Yes, exactly. That's the class sweet spot right there.

JVN [00:28:56] Okay. Okay. I love that idea. Okay. Okay. Well, I guess I don't love it, but I love that I understand it more. Okay. So we got to speak in our cheese episode about U.S. restrictions against raw milk cheese and the biases and anxieties around it. You write about a similar quote "microbiopolitical forms of settler colonial governance." How did Hawai'i's annexation to the US in 1898—okay, so it happens in 1898, how did that usher in a new era for food safety and regulation?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:29:29] It's a great question. We have annexation in 1898. A bunch of American military backed businessmen depose the queen in 1893, put her under house arrest. A provisional government is set up until the U.S. government is able to unilaterally annex Hawai'i by a vote that only happens in the United States. And then at that point, they decide that Hawai'i will become a territory. Hawai'i is a territory until 1959, at which point it becomes a state. And with annexation came the importation of a lot of American legal frameworks that are brought to Hawai'i and come to bear on the social and political landscape there. And one of the ways that it becomes articulated is through food. So in 1906, we have the Wylie Act, which is the Pure Food and Drug Act, which essentially aimed at regulating product labeling, but really product labeling in terms of ideas of purity, quality. Right. You're buying a product that won't get you sick, that won't have anything in it that you don't want in it. Right. That's unadulterated. And that kind of spins off into a lot of different ways of classifying food according to particular criteria. One of the things that I spend a lot of time looking at and thinking about is ice cream and how ice cream becomes shaped by the Pure Food and Drug Act, which is that the U.S. kind of had a little checklist of, "Is it ice cream? Is it not ice cream?" It had to have a certain percentage of butterfat in it. This becomes a huge matter of concern. It has to contain, you know, X numbers of milk solids, whatever it is. So we have particular foods becoming quantified and classified according to new American legal frameworks.

JVN [00:31:29] And we've talked about on Getting Curious, like, the disruption of, like, Native American foodways, like, because of, like, colonialism and, like, the atrocities that, like, happened to Native American people. But, like, how does, like, this just completely monumentally shaped, like, the Indigenous foodways after the 1910s?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:31:46] The way that I come at this in the book is through the story of one particular man who I find so fascinating. His name is Edward Blanchard. And he kind of pops

up as a blip, right, on the landscape of historical figures about Hawai'i. And he kind of disappears from view after the 1910s. But he arrives to Hawai'i in this time period to become the food inspector who worked under the Hawai'i Department of Health. And Edward Blanchard is there to reinforce all of the Pure Food and Drug laws. And there was a fair bit to reinforce. One of the things happening in Hawai'i at that time period was all of these Western diseases were kind of running amok through Hawaiian society. And Native Hawaiians are particularly vulnerable to these forms of disease because they haven't built up immunity over time. One particular outbreak that happened in Hawai'i in the early 1910s is traced to these urban poi shops that Native Hawaiians are buying their staple food from. And Blanchard, it's his job to go in and take care of the situation. He closes down all of the poi vendors in Honolulu. You can't get the staple food anywhere. So all of this stuff is happening at this time. People are dying. Nobody can get the food that they need or want. And he gets completely derailed and distracted from this moment because he becomes obsessed with ice cream in the city. And he comes to the conclusion that the ice cream in Honolulu is not up to American standards and it doesn't have enough butterfat in it. So he writes to the President of the Board of Health. And he says, "Look, something more urgent is coming up, can you get somebody else on the cholera beat so that I can start to arrest people for not selling rich ice cream."

JVN [00:33:53] Priorities.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:33:56] Priorities. I'm super fascinated with this guy because it's, it's kind of fucked, right, that people are dying, but he wants to make sure that ice cream is rich enough. And for me, that really says so much about what's getting valued in this particular point in time when American power is on the rise in Hawai'i. Because in some respects, it's a life and death situation that gets completely sidelined and ignored for purposes of intensifying pleasure and richness and sweetness and coldness.

JVN [00:34:30] So what does that work further reveal about the US attempts to, like, "civilize" Hawai'i and, like, impart American ways of life on Hawai'i?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:34:42] I think that it really does something to increase the value of imported foods, of Western foods, and to decrease the value of place-based Native Hawaiian foods. So Hawai'i is getting a huge amount of importation by this time period. And before this time period, you know, the vast majority of food imports are already coming from the United States. And this just reinforces it even more.

JVN [00:35:10] So what other sites and sources worked to, like, adapt local tastes to American ideals?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:35:17] One place that you can really track changing tastes is through institutions, right? Hospitals, schools, training centers, whatever it is that has a kind of food program, you can look at what's on the menu in those places to really see how they're forming ideas about what people should be eating. So even in Native Hawaiian schools and Native

Hawaiian institutions, you can see traditional foods that are starting to almost inevitably always be capped off with ice cream for dessert, right. It's that first thing that starts to appear and to start to shift the foodscape.

JVN [00:35:56] It's the ice cream for dessert thing!

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:35:58] Yeah, it's the ice cream for dessert thing. It's the beginning of the end.

JVN [00:36:02] Also, what's poi?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:36:04] Oh, yeah! Poi is, like, mashed up fermenting taro root. It's mashed up with just a little bit of water and then it naturally ferments over time. So as it gets older, it becomes sour and kind of more probiotic.

JVN [00:36:22] But now we can eat it? And it's, like, okay.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:36:24] Yeah, now we're loving it. But it's not cheap. It's super expensive to buy at the supermarket. Maybe you're lucky enough to have the time and the resources to make your own. A lot of folks are starting to buy poi from local producers now. That's changing in Hawai'i as we speak. But at that point in time, it was, like, *the* staple food. It was, like, at the heart of every single Native Hawaiian person's dinner table, and lunch table, and breakfast table.

JVN [00:36:51] It was like a really central, like, food source.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:36:54] Yeah, it was like one of the main things.

JVN [00:36:58] So what's the significance of shave ice to aesthetics and iconography from 1959 when Hawai'i became a US state and onwards?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:37:07] Well, yeah, so this was kind of the last part of the book that I wrote, and it was a chapter that I was really avoiding for a long time because I kind of didn't really know what to do with it. I knew that it was important to the story of ice in Hawai'i, but it took me a long time to fit it into the trajectory of my story. So shave ice comes to Hawai'i in the early 20th century, by most estimations, by way of Japan. So there are a lot of Japanese sugar plantation workers. In Japan they have kakigōri. They bring it over to Hawai'i, they start selling it in the plantation communities, out of plantation stores, and people are eating it and they're really enjoying it. But it doesn't become significant to the story of how we think about Hawai'i until the 1960s and 1970s and 1980s. So essentially the post-statehood moment. The reason why this is so interesting to me is that shave ice is around for a really long time. It doesn't get celebrated until a moment when multiculturalism becomes the selling point for American statehood. Before that, there's all of these anxieties about Hawai'i's appropriateness

as a U.S. state because it's "not white enough." Right. There's too many people of color in Hawai'i. There's too many Asian people in Hawai'i. Remember, we're coming out of a moment of Asian exclusion from the U.S. and this started to change in 1959 when the U.S. decides, right, instead of being super anxious about the multicultural society of Hawai'i, it becomes celebrated as what the U.S. could be. And shave ice all of a sudden, the iconography of it starts to pop up everywhere, right? Rainbows explode all over Hawai'i as the symbol of multiculturalism and shave ice fits straight into that, because it is an edible rainbow.

JVN [00:39:19] Mm. That makes sense. It's also interesting that that becomes, like, a selling point, and then it would still be, like, six more years before the Voting Rights Act is passed. And it would be, like, six more years before, like, Black women would still have the right to vote in the United States. But what does this emphasis on, like, "multiculturalism" miss and get wrong? Like, the erasure of Indigenous people?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:39:44] Yes. And so through all of these celebrations of liberal state multiculturalism, one of the effects that it has, while it is celebrating diversity, it also collapses Native Hawaiian identities into just any other ethnic category in Hawai'i, which really starts to erase the political specificity of Indigenous peoples.

JVN [00:40:10] Yes. Hawai'i has its own specific cultural history and its own specific language, its own, like, very specific, like, its own story, and there's, like, really specific, like, beautiful histories that, like, deserve to be, like, honored and respected.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:40:21] Yeah. And I think that it also sidesteps claims to political sovereignty that are so important for Native Hawaiians.

JVN [00:40:28] As long as we're talking about giving stuff back, and, like, returning power to, like, the places where it's supposed to, like, is like a Hawaiian, like, un-statehood a thing?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:40:37] Yeah. I mean, I think a lot of, a lot of folks want that. A lot of folks are trying very actively to envision what it would be like for the U.S. to get the fuck out. Hawai'i was overtaken illegally by the United States. The US is illegally occupying Hawai'i and they should not be there.

JVN [00:40:57] Yeah, especially when we, like, look at how mad we all were, like, with, you know, Vladimir and Crimea and stuff and, like, Ukraine now. Like, we literally did that.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:41:09] Yeah, there's a double standard.

JVN [00:41:12] Yeah. Like, we literally super duper did that.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:41:15] Bunch of times. Bunch of times, bunch of places.

JVN [00:41:19] So many, so many times. Bunch of times. Bunch of places. So how does the cold chain in Hawai'i function today? Like, if a natural disaster were to strike Hawai'i, like, how would food security fare?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:41:30] So one of the most often repeated statistics about Hawai'i is that it imports about 89% of everything that it eats, only 11 or so percent of what Hawai'i eats is grown there. And this is a little bit of a tragedy because Hawai'i has a nearly year round growing season. It has these histories of incredible abundance. And yet folks that live in Hawai'i are super reliant on the global food chain in order to get their daily sustenance. A lot of people think that the reason why groceries are so expensive in Hawai'i and Hawai'i has some of the most expensive groceries in the United States is that this food travels a really long way to get there. But as I drilled down into the data about the costs and the economics of all of this importation, one of the things that I realized was that a lot of the expense comes from energy infrastructures that are required to keep things cold and fresh. So it's the freezing and the refrigeration technology that is the really expensive part of all of this food importation. Right? Things need to be kept at a particular temperature as it goes from, you know, say, South America up to ports in California and over to Hawai'i. That's a long time to keep something fresh. And it's really expensive.

JVN [00:43:01] Because if it was, like, some, like, jerky they could stay at room temperature or, like, you didn't have to keep it, like, refrigerated to a certain thing. Like, it would be, like, so much cheaper to, like, get it over there, like, it's just because, like, all of that cost just gets passed on to the consumer.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:43:17] Yeah. And I mean, it still costs money to do all of that importation.

JVN [00:43:23] But, like, way more expensive due to keeping it cold.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:43:25] Yeah, it, it takes a lot of energy, and once it gets there, it has to be kept cold, too, right? It has to be kept cold in a warehouse, in a store. And once it gets to the home in people's refrigerators, so this is an energy intensive system.

JVN [00:43:38] So that makes sense. So what can the story of ice in Hawai'i tell us about broader U.S. interventions in foodways, especially in other places enmeshed in U.S. imperialism?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:43:49] For me, I think one of the most important parts to remember is that we've become super reliant on thermal regulation for our daily sustenance. Right. And that has become incredibly normative to the way that we live our lives. We don't really think about our refrigerators and our freezers as being part of the story of colonialism. We don't really think about our cocktails as being part of the story either. And that's because it's become completely normalized in how we live our lives. There's something really dangerous

about that normalization because we take it for granted, first of all, and that we don't connect it to broader global histories and, of course, to the future of the world.

JVN [00:44:36] It kind of reminds me of Meredith Broussard, who taught us about the term techno-chauvinism and how, like, when we think that, like, a machine can, like, do it better than, like, what a human could or would. It makes us super reliant on, like, so many things that we do take for granted. Like, if electricity went out tomorrow, like, all that food spoils, like, and I think also we think of—or at least to me—like, you think about, like, times before refrigerators and like before air conditioners as being these, like, really, like, primitive, like, scary, like, weird other times. But like, and also I feel, like, kind of disconnects you from the reality of, like, what it is to be like, human, like, and it also makes you feel like, "Oh, well, that was such a long time ago, and we're not like that now," but we actually still are like that.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:45:20] Yeah, there's a kind of precarity that comes with this overdependence on crazy and refrigeration technologies. And I think, you know, those earliest months of the COVID 19 pandemic really hit that home for a lot of folks that were struggling to get their hands on food. Right. I mean, the food chain really started to fall apart for a while and it was scary and it was really difficult for the most vulnerable among us.

JVN [00:45:48] So who's working to restore Indigenous foodways in Hawai'i and how do foodways factor into calls for Hawaiian sovereignty?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:45:55] The food sovereignty movement in Hawai'i has been really active over the last 15 or 20 years. And there are a lot of community groups in Hawai'i, both Native Hawaiian and non-Native folks that are working in solidarity to not only restore Indigenous foodways, but to also restore the ecosystems that support them. So there are chefs that are working with local ingredients. There are also food producers that are working with traditional agricultural technologies in order to facilitate and foster better food security.

JVN [00:46:36] Such important work.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:46:39] And for me, this really hinges on the ways that food traverses, right? Our tastes and our bodies and cuisine, as well as agriculture and the use of land. Right. And so calls for Native Hawaiian political sovereignty are about the return of Hawaiian lands back to Hawaiian people. But also, when we think about food sovereignty in particular, it's the power to dictate one's own food systems.

JVN [00:47:12] Mm. So with writing Cooling The Tropics, what was it like to research? And, like, how did you develop the idea and the framework for this?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:47:20] Well, Jonathan, it was a real pain in the ass. [BOTH LAUGH] One of the challenges in taking a topic that was so normalized that it kind of fades from view was that it ended up being really hard to track, right? There's nothing in the archives that indexes

pleasure and coldness. There are very few ways that you're not just, like, looking for a needle in a haystack. I have a library degree. And I think that made me overly ambitious and maybe cocky when I was coming at this because I'm, like, "I'm trained to do this shit. I can find the needles in the haystack." And it took a really long time, and it required me to look all around the issue. Right? So I had to think about where and when people would be talking about weather, would be talking about comfort. Would be talking about race and leisure. Would be talking about alcohol. Purity. Right? All of these things that create that become part of the fabric of the story. And eventually, when you stitch the fabric together enough, you get the picture of ice. But it took a lot of work.

JVN [00:48:29] So where would you find that? Like, diaries, newspapers?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:48:34] Photographs, menus, material culture, government documents, laws, anything I could get my hands on. I had to get really creative.

JVN [00:48:45] The menu sticks out to me. Like, what was, like, the oldest or, like, random thing that you found on, like, a menu?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:48:52] I spent a lot of time with the menus that were produced for entertainment at the Royal Palace. So what the Native Hawaiian royalty were using for diplomatic dinners, hosting diplomatic dinners. You had some turtle soup. You had ice cream. You had native fruits. It was just this whole cacophony of tastes and products that were coming together that showed Hawai'i off as a civilized and cosmopolitan space.

JVN [00:49:23] Because it's, like, as news was starting to spread and, like, journalism and, like, word of mouth, like, because, like, things were just moving a little bit faster, like, by the 1800s than they were, like, realizing that people were talking about things like eugenics and, like, evolution of people and, like, civility. I just would imagine that would be such, like, a simmery, boil-y, scary time just for all of, like, places that we're dealing with, like, imperialism and colonialism.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:49:48] But one of the best bits about Hawai'i in the 1800s is that Native Hawaiians were so down with print culture. It was an incredibly literate population. And Native Hawaiians wrote prolifically and published prolifically in both the English language and 'Ōlelo Hawai'i, the first language of Hawai'i. And so there's actually a huge corpus of material that you can look at in the Hawaiian language to see how Native Hawaiians were processing all of these social changes.

JVN [00:50:22] Was there, like, a more popular response to those social changes? Was it all over the spectrum?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:50:29] It was all over the spectrum, and it was actively and hotly debated within these kind of fields of print. It's this whole cacophony of voices. Sometimes we think

about print culture as having these dominant voices, and there are some dominant voices. But here is such a proliferation of Native Hawaiian ideas and stories in this time period that are super important.

JVN [00:50:53] So what do you hope people take away from, from your project and from this book?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:51:00] I want to push people to interrogate kind of the, the hidden fabrics of their daily lives and to understand how and why they're there and how, also, we've been trained to not really think about them. Because they come from somewhere and they come from reasons. And I want to really think about what those reasons are. I want to start paying attention to what sometimes gets normalized or hidden.

JVN [00:51:27] So I mean, you have, like, such an incredibly fascinating academic background with degrees in food studies, decorative arts, design and culture and library science. So fucking cool. So how have each of these academic experiences informed your work?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:51:45] I'm a little bit of an academic odd duck. But I think one of the things that I've come to appreciate about interdisciplinary work is really the freedom to ask questions and to have confidence that those questions can guide the methods of the project. Right. So many folks that work within disciplines have these rigid frameworks for how they can come at a particular idea or concept. And for me, it was, like, "I have this question. It's kind of a weird question and I'm going to go in whatever direction I think I need to go in order to get at the answer." And I didn't have anybody telling me that I couldn't come at it this way or that way. For me, that is the joy of being an interdisciplinary scholar.

JVN [00:52:35] I love that it, like, feels a little more fearless, like, feels a little bit less constrained. Like, you can ask the questions you need to ask and you don't need to be, like, so worried about, like, you just got to find the answer. And it comes from, like, a lot of different sources. I just think that is so cool. We got to read that you're now working on a project about cultural memory, commemoration, and hauntings in Hawai'i State Parks. Ah! Can you tell us a little bit about where you are with this project?

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:53:02] I can. It's in the really early stages. I'm trying to think about the post-statehood moment, right? Hawai'i becomes a state. All of a sudden, it can access all of these federal funds. Once it can access federal funds and invest in these infrastructure projects. Two of the biggest infrastructure projects that Hawai'i invests in are roads and the state parks. But once it designates these spaces for state parks, right, spaces of leisure and tourism, both local and continental tourism, they have to figure out what to do with all of the, like, people and landmarks and things that are in these spaces. And so it completely reconfigures these social landscapes. So that leads to weird negotiations with the state to be able to remain on state park lands. Very spectacular evictions of villages that lived in these places, the removal of Native Hawaiian remains and bones, like, all kinds of things, get

removed from these parks. And I'm really interested in tracking these reconfigured human and non-human geographies.

JVN [00:54:10] It's so cool and so interesting. Has there just been any, like, haunting as haunting, like, is there just someone, like…

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:54:18] Yes! There are so many hauntings. There are so many ancestors that are in these places that have ideas about being returned to these places. There's a lot of stuff going on.

JVN [00:54:35] Wowsers. I am so fascinated. This has been, like, so eye opening. But I just love you so much, and also, like, we have to have you back to talk about your new project when you're done because, like, wow, part two, we are obsessed and we're just so grateful for your time.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:54:51] Jonathan, you are such a wonderful interviewer and you're really kind and you're really generous. And I'm really grateful for this opportunity to talk to you.

JVN [00:55:00] Oh my god, the pleasure's literally all ours, and Hi'ilei, congratulations on the book. Y'all, we are going to include a link so you can buy it and get into this research and get into this work, this is the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. So, honey you've got a lot more where that came from.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:55:16] One of the one of the things about the book that I love so much is that when it was getting published and they mocked up this cover, this beautiful, like rainbow cover, I was talking to the designer and I was, like, "Do you think it would be possible to make it, like, shiny or sparkly somehow?" And they were, like, "We don't really do that." And then I got word just last week that the publisher agreed that they would do an iridescent cover, [JVN GASPS] but only for the first run of the book. So I'm going to—

JVN [00:55:42] Get it!

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:55:45] I have a shiny edition and the shiny edition is the first edition, and then subsequent printings will be, you know, pretty standard paper.

JVN [00:55:53] Ohmigod! So run, don't walk. Yeah, run, don't walk. For the first edition.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:55:56] You'll get the shiny one.

JVN [00:55:57] Oh, my God, must get the shiny one. I can't wait. But you guys, you need to get this to anyone, too, so go get them books. Thank you so much, Hi'ilei.

HI'ILEI HOBART [00:56:04] Thank you, Jonathan. This is a pleasure.

JVN [00:56:05] Ah! You've been listening to Getting Curious with me, Jonathan Van Ness. Our guest this week was Hi'ilei Julia Kaweipuaakahaopulani Hobart. You'll find links to her work in the episode description of whatever you're listening to the show on. Our theme music is "Freak" by Quiñ, thank you so much to her for letting us use it. If you enjoyed our show, introduce a friend, honey, and please show them how to subscribe. You can follow us on Instagram and Twitter @CuriousWithJVN. Our editor is Andrew Carson. Getting Curious is produced by me, Erica Getto, and Zahra Crim.