When Will Justice Be Served?

Thesis: Israel “IZ” Kamakawiwo’ole tells a tragic narrative through the means of song.

Thesis Map: IZ paints a painful image of the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom, gentrification, and the feeling of defeat.

I. Overthown monarchy
   A. Chorus
   B. Danger

II. Gentrification
   A. Highways
   B. Traffic lights and railroad tracks
   C. Condominiums
   D. Dying culture

III. Defeat
   A. Fighting
   B. Crying

Restated Thesis Map: To highlight injustice. IZ sings this song, painting a painful image about the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom, gentrification, and defeat.
When Will Justice Be Served?

Activism is the act of campaigning to bring out a social or political change within society. It can embody itself in protests, marches, or even being affiliated with an organization or club. All the different avenues that activism branches out into with protests, marches, organizations have one thing in common: a narrative. Narratives are told and/or communicated through several ways, but music in particular provides a well-suited platform for individuals to bring forth their beliefs. Its melodies can be pleasing to the ear while simultaneously containing a message. Israel “IZ” Kamakawiwo’ole tells a tragic narrative through the means of song, painting a painful image of the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom, gentrification, and defeat.

IZ sets a time travel-esque scene, meshing the past with the present. He wonders what Native Hawaii’s royalty would think if they saw the change that Hawaii has underwent for a day. Part of the chorus reads, “Cry for the gods, cry for the people, cry for the land that was taken away.” IZ highlights the colonization and overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom, which was snatched away with the use of militarized force. He expresses his dismay for the culture that was disregarded and viewed as inferior as well as the people who were affected by this tragedy. He feels that the pain has gone so far, and the people of Hawaii are in great danger as he sees further industrializations on the islands.
Throughout the song, IZ mentions the gentrification and urbanization that the islands of Hawaii has experienced. He mentions highways on sacred grounds, traffic lights and railroad tracks, and condominiums. Sacredness is now scarce because roads, buildings, and shopping plazas have desensitized what used to be sacred grounds. IZ is trying to express that the gentrifying will not stop, and more concrete will take place of sacred and cultural grounds. As this furthers, culture and sacredness will slowly wither away.

Not knowing the end of all this madness gives a sense of defeat, as the people in power were the same people who did an unjust deed. IZ thinks about the roles that the kings of Hawaii have played, the warfare that took place to unite all eight islands, all for the land to be taken away and be built upon. He can only imagine how the king would feel to see bloodshed be overpowered by colonization. He envisions an overwhelming sense of sorrow and destruction as he places the current state of his home into the perspective of the royalty if they were to witness what their kingdom turned out to be.

“Hawaii ‘78” is a sorrowful tune that successfully conveys the atrocities committed by the United States. To highlight injustice. IZ sings this song, painting a painful image about the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom, gentrification, and defeat. This artistic form of activism informs listeners about the truth and reality of Hawaii. Indeed, IZ provides an influential and extremely important story about how Hawaii came to be.