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A Political History of Hawaii: Sovereignty and the future of Native self-determination

Coe M. Trevorrow
Bard College

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A Political History of Hawaii: Sovereignty and the future of Native self-determination

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
Coe M. Trevorrow

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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I dedicate this to my high school social studies teacher Ms. Tassill. Without her work and dedication to Hawaiian history this project would not have been possible.

I would like to acknowledge my loving parents, my brother Zac, thank you for everything. Also, a special thank you to Prof. Kemerli for all your help this year.

Abstract

This project will examine the Hawaiian Sovereignty movement through a historical perspective. Beginning with the unification of the Hawaiian Islands, every major event leading to the modern day conflicts of Mauna Kea and Red Hill will be analyzed. The aim of this paper is to predict how the future prospects of Hawaiian Independence fair compared with the existential threats caused by American Hegemony. In doing so, topics such as the broader colonial debate, and native sovereignty are included in the conversation, in an attempt to see how the Hawaiian example stacks up in the broader decolonial discussion.

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Introduction

My Grandfather once told me a story about how he climbed a coconut tree to watch the events of Pearl Harbor when he was a senior at McKinley High School. The tragic, world-altering events of that infamous day in 1941 are so recent in the history of time, they overlap lifetimes with me, born into the generation that will one day tell our future grandchildren about the war in Ukraine. Even if you extend this thought exercise to the entire history of America, a country in the modern world that dictates and influences so much of modern humanity, we are a mere blip on the timeline of Great Empires and Civilizations. It is my intention, and my duty, to extend the scope of your historical perspective, as this project has done to mine. It is my lifelong observation that Americans know virtually nothing about their fiftieth and final state, and even amongst the people of Hawaii, our historical and cultural knowledge is so often deficient. There seems to be an unspoken truth shared amongst the people of Hawaii; a shared understanding that our small cluster of islands remains radically different in all aspects of life from the rest of the country. As the following pages will explain, these differences are hundreds of years in the making. We will watch two countries, of radically different origins, modernize, and eventually, through nefarious means, become one.

This project will examine Hawaiian history, and particularly the evolution of the Hawaiian Sovereignty movement through a chronological lens. We can define the Sovereignty Movement as the overarching political movement that emerged out of the native desire for autonomy. Furthermore, they advocate for several interrelated causes including political autonomy for the native people of Hawaii, a complete end to American hegemony and the reversal of cultural

erosion. While the end goal of the sovereignty movement is sovereignty, the movement is also committed to improving the status quo and protecting the rights of Native Hawaiians. The essential question I am investigating is whether or not the goals of the sovereignty movement are possible given both the historical context and modern crises.

There seems to be a lack of conclusion to the story of Hawaii. There are a number of racial and ethnic minorities assimilated into the American project, and even other nations within the American Empire, yet those people and their circumstances seem relatively settled. The tragedies which built this epic experiment: the legacy of slavery, the subjugation of Asian-Americans, the displacement of Native Americans, etc. have all in part been reduced to shameful memories of our checkered path. However, whether it be the issue of native sovereignty, reparations, and atonement, why does the conversation never lead to America's colonial history in the Pacific? As the years continue to pass without a firm resolution on the question of autonomy and self-determination for the Hawaiian people, I further ask in this project what is the most feasible path to Hawaiian Sovereignty in the 21st Century?

In order to examine these questions, I will engage in an in depth analysis of Hawaii's history, and in particular its relationship with the American Government. To do so, I look at the works of great Native Hawaiian scholar Huanani-Kay Trask and others, political and economic theorist Karl Marx, as well as scholars of Native political movements such as Glen Coulthard. These varying perspectives give us a multitude of insights, not only into the Hawaiian-American relationship, but the larger global struggles of decolonization and cultural re-emergence for

native peoples. My findings center around the interconnectedness of culture, autonomy, and economics. Specifically, I link how American domination and occupation is directly tied to economic exploitation, and the required evils necessary in transforming an entire independent population into an extension of the American empire.

We are at a crossroads in the history of our great islands, and there is an ever present sense that the ongoing clashes between Hawaiian Sovereignty groups with organizations emblematic of the Americanization of Hawaii are fights about much more than surface-level policy. For almost a decade now, the Hawaiian Sovereignty movement has morphed into a revival of Hawaiian culture and self-determination, centered on the infamous Thirty Meter Telescope project (TMT) that involves the controversial plan to build one of the world's largest telescopes on land sacred to the Hawaiian community. Native Hawaiian groups focused around TMT as a modern example of outside interest disrespecting Hawaiian culture, and organized mass protest and encampment at the base of Mauna Kea on the Big Island. Even more recently, the re-ignition of tensions between Native Hawaiians and the military over the Red Hill Oil leaks has worsened relations between two groups on the polar ends of the sovereignty debate. While the continued occupation of Hawaiian land by the US Government is a constant reminder to Hawaiians of their colonial reality, such occupation became hazardous when tens of thousands of gallons of fuel poisoned the drinking water of over 100,00 people. I maintain that these modern episodes are in fact products of political and historical circumstances dictated decades and centuries before. History will here serve as our analytical guide, starting from the creation of the Hawaiian Kingdom, to its

downfall and colonization, concluding with the inception and evolution of the contemporary sovereignty movement.

Chapter 1: Origins of Hawaiian Political History

When attempting to write the political history of an entire Country and its people, it makes sense to start at the beginning .. My conclusion is that political history remains inseparable from history itself. If you research the Political Studies department on Bard's own website, the first words you will see are a definition of politics that begins: "Politics can be understood in many ways: as a struggle for power over other people, groups, and nations; as a social process that determines who has what kinds of authority and how this affects particular communities.."(*Politics Program at Bard College*). Politics is inseparable from history because in every society in human history there has been leadership, organization, labor, and the general distribution of power and influence - typically through a hierarchy. Failure to develop these institutions, or successfully mature them, almost always leads to societal collapse, as even the Romans will tell you.

The first Hawaiians arrived from the Marquesas islands between 1000 and 1200 AD. As would become custom amongst the Hawaiian people, these first voyagers used the navigation of the stars, as well as their understanding of other natural patterns such as migratory bird flight and ocean currents, to cross two-thousand miles of ocean to reach Hawaii (Makawao and Us). These

early Hawaiians developed a system of Governance and social order, the basis of which King Kamehameha would later use to set up the Hawaiian Kingdom. The social hierarchy was split amongst four classes: the Ali'i (Chiefs) , Kahuna (Professionals) , Maka'ainana (Commoners), and Kauwa (slaves). Society was ordered through strict regulations which determined the roles and acceptable behaviors of each class. Here, the basis of the *kapu* system was developed, which punished its violaters with death or enslavement (Makawao and Us). Another fundamental development is the system of land division known as the ahu'puaha. Each island was split into a sliver of land stretching from the mountain to the sea, providing each ahu'puaha the full extent to natural resources required for survival (NPS) . Each ahu'puaha was ruled by an Ali'i, creating separate, often warring tribes.

Kamehameha unites the Hawaiian Islands

Returning to the theme of time, if we consider that the first Hawaiians arrived between 1000-1200 AD, the majority of Hawaiian history, and therefore political history, is ignored in this project. We begin our discussion of the political history of Hawaii in the year 1758, marking the birth of Kamehameha the Great. That means there is roughly five to seven hundred years between those two markers, making up the vast majority of the time the Hawaiian people have actually lived in Hawaii. The reason being, Hawaii in the chain of eight major Islands as we know it today, has only been unified since the 18th Century. This chapter introduces the most important person in the History of Hawaii, the man who turned hundreds of years of fractured leadership and tribal warfare into the united islands we now refer to as Hawaiian Island Chain.

Modern Politics in Hawaii can trace its origin to King Kamehameha's birth in 1758 on the Island of Hawaii. The excellent third-edition textbook *A History of Hawaii* written by Leah Tau-Tassill, Linda Menton, and Eileen Tamura, explains the almost-prophetic nature of Kamehameha's birth. They write "Historians place his birth around the time Halley's Comet passed over the island chain. For the Hawaiians, this event signified greatness to come. At that time it was prophesied that a great one would unify the kingdom and bring peace.(Tau-Tassill et al. 2–10)" From an early age, Kamehameha I began showing the traits destined to define his legacy. As a youth, he excelled academically and athletically - known for his sharp mind and warrior spirit. However, despite his capacity for violence, he was also wise, forgiving, and valued tradition (Tau-Tassill et al. 5–6).

Prior to unification, Hawaii was ruled by Independent chiefs, who governed over an ahupua'a and went to violent lengths to capture others. Kamehameha, using his intelligence, natural leadership, and use of foreign weaponry conquered all 8 major islands, in an unprecedented act of warring might. Kamehameha's army utilized double hulled canoes with foreign sails, along with foreign weaponry to overwhelm his enemies (Tau-Tassill et al. 6). During his crusade, Kamehameha made his own "plata or plomo" offer to his fellow Chiefs. Those who opposed him were swiftly conquered by his forces and their superior weapons. Chiefs who pledged their loyalty received large swaths of lands to control under Kamehameha's new Government. A unified Hawaiian Islands not only had a centralized Government for the first time in its history, but now a line of Royalty and succession which would last five generations of Kamehameha's. Under Kamehameha's Government, the Chieftain system was replaced by Kamehameha as an

absolute monarch, with Ali'i loyal to Kamehameha serving as representatives to each island (Tau-Tassill et al. 5–6).

Kamehameha embarrassed foreigners, bringing a number of them into high-ranking cabinet positions within his administration. After all, it was his relationship with two white Americans, Isaac Davis and John Young, which procured the Western weapons like the swivel cannon, which led to his total unification (*Happy Kamehameha Day ! - King Kamehameha, Isaac Davis, John Young and the Fair American*). Despite this, the ultimate goal of the Kamehameha Dynasty was still the preservation of the Hawaiian indigenous, traditional way of life. The laws of society were adherent to the customs of the Hawaiian Gods - critically the *kapu* system. Under this code, crimes of murder, theft, and offenses against the Gods were punished by death. However, Kamehameha did see reforms that improved lives across the board, as exemplified in the famous 'splintered paddle' story. As it goes, Kamehameha was struck over the head by a paddle pursuing two men he wished to capture for human sacrifice. As he lay on the ground, he overheard one man ask the other why he did not strike him again and finish the job. The other man says that "a man's life is too precious" (*LawOfTheSplinteredPaddle.Pdf*). After sparing his life, King Kamehameha imposed the so-called "Law of the Splintered Paddle", outlawing human sacrifice and granting protections to people from chieftain superiors. The struggle of all societies and their leaders to embrace modernity while maintaining the traditions that made them possible, was a fine-line Kamehameha balanced brilliantly.

It is important to emphasize the global nature of Hawaii's location, and the immediate role foreign-born citizens of the Kingdom played under Kamehameha I. In 1794, Kamehameha the Great oversaw the first migration of non-natives to the islands. These first migrants hailed from as far as England, Ireland, and Portugal in Europe, but also included Americans and Chinese citizens (Wong and Rayson 106–07) . As the Kamehameha bloodlines and general Hawaiian population would soon come to be discovered, the introduction of foreigners would be a double-edged sword for the Hawaiian Islands. On the one hand, outside influence had directly benefited the militarial cause of Hawaii's greatest leader. On the other hand, Hawaii and its abundant natural resources had been exposed to Western and Asian powers, who valued commercializing these commodities over their protection. The theme of Western greed will play a pivot role in the eventual collapse, and future assimilation of the Hawaiian Kingdom into the American Empire.

Foreign Influence grows under Kamehameha II & III

If Kamehameha may have opened the gates to foreigners and the West, the floodgates blew wide open under the two preceding reigns of his succession. Following the Death of Kamehameha the Great, the Kingdom was passed on to Kamehameha II, known as "Liholiho". Under his father, the Kingdom began profiting off the coveted Sandalwood tree through trade with Chinese merchants. Under Liholiho this practice expanded through the first commercial trade with the mainland United States (Kuykendall, Ralph Simpson. *The Hawaiian Kingdom: 1778-1854*

Foundation and transformation. United States, University of Hawaii, 1938.). Traders from Boston arrived on charters offering money, luxury items, and even their own sailing vessels in exchange for this valuable commodity (Kuykendall, Ralph Simpson. The Hawaiian Kingdom: 1778-1854. Foundation and transformation. United States, University of Hawaii, 1938) . The adherence to tradition, particularly the *kapu system* which had been a staple of Kamehameha I's successful reign, began to slip under Liholiho. While his father protected the natural resources of Hawaii's forests by exclusively producing sandalwood from mature trees, Liholiho removed this restriction along with other reforms such as prohibition. While the Kamehameha bloodline would continue to rule Hawaii for six further generations, here the traditional structure put in place by Kamehameha I began to crack under the allure of foreign influence and its seductive wealth.

A major objective of this project is to point out the fundamental differences, both culturally and economically, between the Kingdom of Hawaii and the United States of America. My argument is that the Hawaiian people have not only been victimized by Western-style Capitalism, but such economic systems are diametrically opposed to the Native Hawaiian models of environmental cohabitation, which sustained ecological balance for hundreds of years prior to Western introduction. Take a look at the painting below from Marilyn Kahalewai which illustrates how the *ahu'puaha* system maximizes utility by strategic planting and water management.

The first great tragedy of Hawaii's western introduction may have been the devastating efficiency with which introduced-viruses spread through an immune population. But in short

succession a new threat began seeping its way into Hawaiian society. Just as so many Western cultural norms clashed with pre-Colonial Hawaiian society, the assimilation of the land itself as a marketable commodity directly opposed the community-oriented ahupua'a system. Even prior to Kamehameha's unification of Hawaii, the fundamental ideology of Hawaiian life sustained itself on a model of collective prosperity. With a tropical climate, fertile lands, and bountiful seas, it requires a mere sliver of land extending from mountain to ocean for a society to continually prosper. This model, which the colonizer calls "primitive", self-sustains through the adherence of rules and customs which prioritize the next generation over modern luxury. For example, Hawaiians developed advanced systems of aquaculture to regulate overfishing. These included elaborate fishponds with gates wide enough for smaller fish to escape, repopulating the ocean (*The Return of Kū'ula*). The value of the collective, and the appreciation of nature is the positive moral bi-product of such systems. Dr. Kekuni Blaisdell, a staunch advocate of Hawaiian sovereignty said of this transition "We're caught in a cultural conflict and have been ever since the first foreigners arrived. The dominant Western culture is based on an economic, capitalist system... Our culture is the antithesis. Instead of taking, we give. In our tradition, the fisherman catches fish not only for himself, but for everyone in the ahupua'a. (*Kanaka Maoli Healing Practices - Dr. Kekuni Blaisdell - Healthcare / In Motion Magazine*)" Dr. Blaisdell perfectly explains the incompatibility of the Hawaiian way of life with the exponential growth ideology of Western capital as not only incongruent, but fundamentally polar.



PC: Marilyn Kahalewai

The selfless, community-oriented nature of the Ahu'puaha system is illustrated by Historical Researcher Carol Silva who writes "Pre-contact Hawaiians depended upon an extremely ordered and equitable system of land division in which district boundaries were most carefully planned and laid out. This guaranteed that all natives residing within these boundaries would receive a fair share in the rights, privileges, and benefits essential for a self-sufficient yet comfortable life. Private land ownership was unknown, and public, common use of the ahupua'a resources demanded that boundaries be drawn to include sufficient land for residence and cultivation, freshwater sources, shoreline and open ocean access. (*Archaeological Investigation of Hule'ia National Wildlife Refuge Ha'iku, Niunalu, Kaua'*) "

Disease ravishes the Islands

While Marx argues the original sin of Capitalism is the violent nature in which primitive accumulation takes place, often enriching the wealthy at the further expense of the poor, the arrival of Westerners brought something much deadlier than economic theory. Research from Professor David Swanson, a sociologist at the University of California-Riverside, shows the horrifying pace disease decimated the Native Hawaiian population: "By 1800, the decline from the 1778 population is 47.5 percent, by 1820 it is 70.7 percent, and by 1840 it is 83.8 percent. These declines are consistent with the newly introduced diseases and related factors that affected the Native Hawaiian population from the time of first contact to 1840" (Swanson).

As if the picture could not get any worse, there is evidence to suggest that ignorance was no excuse for Captain Cook and his expedition, being the first Whites to “discover” the Islands in 1778. Sarah Goo of the Pew Research Center, who analyzed Professor Swanson’s data in context of the modern Native Hawaiian population uptick, explains how the Captain was well aware of the potential harm the diseases his men carried would have on a defenseless population. She states “Captain Cook and his crew wrote in well-documented accounts about concerns that they had infected the population with venereal diseases (Cook said he unsuccessfully tried to prevent his men from mingling with the native women). Over the years, many other infectious diseases and illnesses such as measles, chicken pox, polio and tuberculosis killed thousands of Hawaiians. (Goo)”

As with so many native populations, their implosion is inevitable with the first introduction of diseases to which they have no immunity. Journalist and archaeological researcher Graham Hancock, author of such books as *Fingerprints of the Gods*, uses the example of new findings in the Amazon rainforest as an indication of how quickly Native populations can be eradicated through disease, as had happened in Hawaii during the late 18th century. Hancock explains that in the 1560’s a Spanish explorer named Fransisco de Orellana traveled the length of the Amazon rainforest reporting massive cities, advanced arts, and a flourishing civilization. Expeditions attempted to verify these claims thirty years later, but found no such cities and their inhabitants. While those at the time believed him to have fabricated the entire story, new ground penetrating Li-Dar technology has uncovered evidence of precisely what Orellana described. Therefore, Hancock concludes it took less than thirty years of disease to nearly-eradicate the natives,

leaving their cities to be consumed by the jungle growth (*The Ancient Civilisation Of The Amazon River - Graham Hancock Official Website*).

Marx's 'Precapital' & The Great Mahele

In the transformation from communal sufficiency, mirrored in the Native American experience, the natural resources of a populous are commodified, and sold to the highest bidder. Naturally this process erases the intentionality of the Native systems of cultivation through preservation. The commodification process brings into the discussion the infamous political philosopher Karl Marx, whose critique of Adam Smith's rose-tinted view of primitive accumulation sheds important light into the Hawaiian situation. Marx critiques Adam Smith's capitalist theory of a peaceful transition of natural resources into commodities, arguing the process of societies commodifying their resources organizes the system of surplus-value which divides the citizenry into economic classes. The term 'Primitive Accumulation' was coined by Marx which he describes as political economy's "original sin" likening the process to Adam and Eve's misdeed in the Garden of Eden, setting off a unknowable series of terrors. Marx writes "The legend of theological original sin tells us certainly how man came to be condemned to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow; but the history of economic original sin reveals to us that there are people to whom this is by no means essential... Thus it came to pass that the former sort accumulated wealth, and the latter sort had at last nothing to sell except their own skins" (*Economic Manuscripts: Capital Vol. I - Chapter Twenty-Six*).

Marx's argument is that the religious bargain of reaping what you sow, is not honored in the world of Capitalist economics. If a system requires the very land to be stripped from its original people, leaving them with "nothing to sell but their skins" you have turned a thriving society into a mere collection of wage laborers (note the Agricultural shift from subsistence farming to profitable Sugarcane as evidence). Just as the concept of land-ownership was foreign to Hawaiians, so were the ideas of valuing communal resources as a mechanism of wealth accumulation to the western business interests, and Chiefs who lined their own pockets to facilitate their greed.

In 1848, Kamehameha III continued his brother's pattern of Westernizing the Monarchy by delegating the immeasurably valuable lands of Hawaii into private ownership. Under the pressure of American business interests concerned over the survivability of their businesses without the ability to own land, Kamehameha III passed a series of laws known as the "Great Mahele", the Hawaiian word for land-division. First, foreigners were given the right to purchase land. Secondly, a purposefully-complex system of land claims was established for the existing Hawaiian population. Finally, lands were divided, giving 23% to the King, 39% to the Chiefs, with 37% being set aside as Government lands. That left just 1% of all land in the hands of the Maka'ainana (common people) who were the overwhelming majority of the population ("The Great Mahele").

Like much of the erosion of Hawaiian tradition and self-governance, the events of the ‘Great Mahele’ did not happen all at once. As Marx explains, the process of commodification is in actuality a manufactured division between those with the means to produce and their employees, which he argues makes them no more capital than the means of subsistence. In Hawaii, this process of commercial real-estate begins with the decline of other exploitative industries such as sandalwood and whaling. Notice the necessity for Capital to constantly evolve and exploit; once one natural resource is depleted, in this case the very trees from our forests and creatures from our oceans, Capital must find another means of surplus.

The missionaries and traders were naturally the most vocal advocates for such transformation, making the ludicrous argument that the commoners had the most to gain. Their logic followed that land ownership would alleviate the hierarchy between the Ali'i (Chief) class and Maka'ainana (common people). While the Western business interests attempted to masquerade their greed as charity, they fundamentally conflate the core difference between land ownership and rights. The American tradition emphasizes the commodification of land as a mechanism to status, wealth, and political representation. However, unlike the American tradition, there was never a thought amongst native Hawaiians that land could ever be owned. Instead, the hierarchy between Chief and Commoners was merely a cog in a greater machine of subsistence, not a barrier between the have and have-nots.

Under advice from missionaries in his cabinet, Kamehameha III developed the ‘Land Commission’ in 1845, tasked with the separation of property between Crown lands, the landlord

class, and the common folk. Initially, the commission equally divided the lands between all three entities. However, through a complex system of bureaucracy, the Crown and her wealthy, western sponsors seized a far greater slice of the pie (which had always been the intention). The Chieftain class, which had been given the opportunity to receive land titles for a fee, gave up much of their lands to carry favor with the crown. Secondly, the Kuleana Act of 1850 outlined a lengthy, complex conditions required for the maka'ainana to retain the lands they tended. These included: land surveying, a land claim with proof of cultivation, and finally an official hearing where claims were frequently contested. The Land Commission also set strict time periods in which claims could be made, far shorter than the other groups (Tau-Tassill et al. 138–42). These laws evoke Jim Crow era voting restrictions, giving access to rights with such purposefully-strict parameters, they become practically worthless. In all, seventy-four percent of Hawaiians empty-handed and left to become wage-labor for the Plantation owner class that had robbed them blind. By the time the land commission was dissolved, the 33% delegated for the commoner class had been shrunk to a single percentage.

Given the value of land in Hawaii, and the crucial nature of multi-generational home ownership to create lasting wealth in America, we can understand how native Hawaiians have and continue to be cheated out of lands they once exclusively roamed. In 2021, as the average home price in Hawaii exceeded \$1.2 million, the *Honolulu Civil Beat* found native Hawaiians were overrepresented in the homeless population to the tune of 210% (Seitz). While a number of unfortunate circumstances are responsible for that daunting statistic, it is undeniable that the

majority of Hawaiians were cheated out of property worth hundreds of millions of dollars by current valuations.

Beginning of Sugarcane Plantation

Armed with the ability to own their own agricultural lands in Hawaii, American business interests developed a new, thriving industry that took advantage of Hawaii's tropical climate - Sugarcane. The Sugarcane Industry and its notoriously-greedy "Big-5" would come to shape the modern trajectory of Hawaiian history. The astronomical demand for cheap sugar available to the mainland US took production from 300,000 pounds in 1846, to over 24 million pounds by 1874 (Minatodani). The same time period saw mass-migration particularly from China, Japan, and the Philippines, establishing the Asian and mixed-Asian majority population present in Hawaii to this day. An estimated 46,000 Chinese, 180,000 Japanese, and 126,000 Filipino people arrived as field labor for the Sugarcane plantations (Minatodani). Industry leaders, the white American businessmen who own the plantations, used a multitude of tactics to maximize profits and stifle labor disputes. Asian immigrants were brought from different countries in an attempt to establish natural competition and spite, lowering the overall bargaining power of the labor force.

Additionally, other white races such as Portuguese, were seen as more Western and were therefore tasked with keeping the field workers in line, receiving positions of authority in the Plantation system.

The timing of Asian migration into Hawaii is critical because it develops a racially diverse, non-white majority pre-American colonization. Census data from 2020 and 2022 concludes

Hawaii scores the highest percentage (76%) on the Diversity Index with the chance two people chosen at random in any given state will be a racial minority. However, when broken down, Native Hawaiians combined with other Pacific Islanders living in Hawaii, make up just over 10% of the States population (*U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Hawaii*). Given the historical context of disease, colonization, and migration patterns, Hawaiian Sovereignty would today affect a far greater number of Asian and mixed-race peoples who see themselves as citizens of Hawaii, than Native Hawaiians themselves.

From Kingdom, to Territory, to Statehood

There is no other way to describe the transition of the Hawaiian Kingdom into the State of Hawaii, and the subjugation of the People of Hawaiian into Americans as any less than illegal, immoral, and unresolved. While the story of American colonization is not isolated in the Hawaiian Islands, the role of the American Government and by extension military, is opportunist rather than instigator.

The seeds of revolt were sewn by a group of roughly 400 American men, known as the ‘Hawaiian League’. These Americans and their business interests opposed the rule of Hawaii’s last male Monarch, David Kalakaua, forming secretive organizations and arming a resistance

force. Many of these insurrectionists had direct ties to the Monarchy, including Walter Murray Gibson, the League's founder who also served in various Cabinet positions under Kalakaua. Gibson was influential in pushing the Monarchy towards Americanization. Starting in the mid 1880's, the Hawaiian league began importing weapons to form an all-white militia known as the Honolulu Rifles. In July of 1887, these militiamen surrounded Iolani Palace, and forced at gunpoint the signature of the so-called "Bayonet Constitution". This document ceded the all important port of Pearl Harbor to the Americans, and further opened trade with the mainland. The document also revised the rules of voting through Jim Crow style political repression. Voting now required both land-ownership and a literacy test, denying the vast majority of Native Hawaiians political representation. Furthermore, the powers of the King were significantly curtailed, making the head of state a ceremonial figurehead with little political weight to counteract the puppet-state's "elected" officials (Tau-Tassill et al. 31-41). While the official end of the Hawaiian monarchy occurred under Kalakaua's sister Liliokalani, 1887 marks the last year that Hawaii was ruled by a Native Hawaiian.

Just four years after signing the Bayonet Constitution, Kalakuaua dies from liver failure in San Francisco on his way back from a world tour. The throne is passed to Hawaii's final monarch Queen Liliokalani, a beloved figure in Hawaiian history. The Queen is tasked with numerous challenges including: economic collapse, a weakened monarchy, and the looming threat of American dominance. The Queen immediately gets to work restoring the political power of the monarchy and by proxy the Hawaiian people. Liliuokalani drafted a new Constitution in 1892 restoring the powers of the Kingdom and granting voting rights back to Native Hawaiians. These

actions angered the American business community who assumed the coming years would transition the remaining powers of the Monarchy over to a Provisional American-backed government. In response, the insurrectionists formed the "Committee of Safety " which would lead the eventual coup to overthrow the monarchy. With backing from the Naval Ship the USS Boston, Liliokalani was forced to abdicate her throne. After armed Hawaiians attempt and fail to restore her power, the Queen is imprisoned in her own Palace under charges of treason. In 1898, the United States formally annexed Hawaii in Congress, and President Grover Cleveland made Sanford B. Dole, a leading insurrectionist and sugar magnate, the Provisional Governor (Tau-Tassill et al. 31–41) .

Between 1898-1959 the so-called "Territory of Hawaii" saw continued tensions between the white colonial interests and Native Hawaiian population. While the Territory maintained the racist voting policies enforced through the Bayonet Constitution, the non-white population was a substantial enough voting block to send representatives to Washington who upheld the interests of the Native population. The Home Rule party was founded, and sent two influential politicians to Washington for the first time in Hawaiian history. Robert Wilcox, who led Natives in the failed Coup of 1895, was elected as the first Congressional representative. However, despite his appeals to Congress, as a non-voting member, the power remained overwhelmingly in the hands of majority-white ruling class. In 1902, Wilcox lost to Republican Jonah Kuhio, a direct bloodline descendant of the Monarchy. Kuhio balances the interests of the "Dole Machine" with those of his own people, often clashing with the five major sugar conglomerates. Kuhio was a

popular figure amongst Hawaiians, and served in Congress until his death in 1922 (Tau-Tassill et al. 31–41).

The calls for Statehood had dominated the relationship between Honolulu and Washington over this roughly sixty year period. In 1919 Representative Kuhio proposed the first bill for Hawaii to officially join the Union. In total, a Hawaiian Statehood bill would face congress forty-eight times before becoming law in 1959. During this period, Statehood was hugely popular amongst the Native population, who voted 2-1 in favor during a 1940 plebiscite. During the Congress of 1959, support for Hawaiian statehood was strong in both Washington and Hawaii, backed by President Dwight Eisenhower. Congress passes the ‘Hawaii Statehood Act’ with overwhelming ease in both houses, allowing for a final vote by the People of Hawaii. The Act was easily ratified by a vote of 132,773 to 7,971 and Hawaii became the 50th State on August 21, 1959 (Tau-Tassill et al. 41–52).

Chapter II: Why us and not them?

On my way back from Hawaii in January of my final semester at Bard, I flew the Delta nonstop between Honolulu to JFK. My current interest as a politics student in this project intensified my astonishment at this country’s inclusion of such a distant territory. Once you take off, you see the Islands east of Oahu: Molokai, Lanai, Maui, and finally the Big Island. Once Mauna Kea is out of sight, there is nothing but dark ocean for about five hours. It’s about halfway to New York when the Western coastline first appears. I always loved flying into LAX or San Francisco at

night; seeing California emerge out of the Ocean with its bright lights. Once passed the California coast, it's nature, small-town America, and farmland until the colossus of the New York Area comes into view. I realized, the vast majority of Americans probably think a five-hour flight is the longest you can fly domestically, since America has always been "from sea to shining sea". How strange a nation, with such a defined border, added two non-contiguous land masses as its final States. Not only is the study of Statehood necessary for historical context, but the natural comparison with other US Occupied territories is fundamental to understanding the Union as we know it today.

Hurricane Maria of 2017, brought Puerto Rico into the National spotlight for the worst possible reason. This devastating natural disaster, that damaged over 90% of homes on the Island, outlined the failures and inequities of modern American colonialism. As outlined by the American Bar Association in their analysis of the American Government's disaster response, applying American standards to a fundamentally non-American society is inherently problematic. The report uses the evidence of FEMA rejecting the assistance claims of hundreds of thousands of homeowners as proof of this strange relationship and its shortcomings (*Hurricanes Irma and Maria: Impact and Aftermath* | RAND). Puerto Rico has historically been liberal about housing development, leading many Puerto Ricans to turn to abandoned and foreclosed lands as homesteads. However, despite this turnover benefiting the island as a whole, FEMA claims these structures and their inhabitants lack the necessary legal paperwork to receive disaster aid. The arrogance of America, to occupy a place and call their people its citizens, and yet deny these "citizens" voting representation or basic protections is breathtaking.

Puerto Rico, unlike Hawaii, was never independent. Besides the fact that Puerto Rico was handed over a spoil of war between Imperial powers instead of losing its independence, the case of Hawaii and Puerto Rico share striking resemblance. While 1898 marked the last year of Monarchy rule in Hawaii, it also started the American Occupation in Puerto Rico as the American empire made headway into Spanish territory in the Americas. As tropical islands thousands of miles from the American mainland, Hawaii and Puerto Rico are caught in the same “will they, won't they” narrative for the extent of their territorial status. Just as questions of Hawaiian statehood were being raised long before 1959, Puerto Ricans have long demanded the freedom they still lack since the inception of American occupation. In 1900, The Foraker Act granted a local civilian Government parallel to Washington, but denied full rights as Americans or a pathway to Independence (*Foraker Act (1900) | Definition, Significance, Puerto Rico, & U.S. History | Britannica*). The American political establishment worried that Puerto Rican statehood would inevitably coincide with the further assimilation of the Philippines, consequently creating a super-state of people Americans considered to be foreign. Filipino journalist and author Zaldy Dandan writes about the sequence of events leading to American occupation, and the eventual Independent Philippine nation. Dandan outlines both the racial and political motivations behind Filipino exclusion, writing “The Americans did not want to grant Statehood to an archipelago 8,000 miles away...inhabited by 16 million colored people. (“Why the Philippines Couldn't Be a US State”)” Identically to Puerto Rico, the US received the Philippines in 1898, as one of their spoils following the defeat of Spain. America wished to occupy land on the Asian continent with the looming threat of China conveniently in their

relative backyard. It's an interesting thought exercise to imagine what election night in America would look like if our nation's most populous state lay on another continent.

To this day the list of American territories includes: Puerto Rico, Guam, Micronesia, and American Samoa, just to name a few. These territories are home to American citizens, but in so many respects are far from American. During the aforementioned Hurricane Maria disaster of 2017, polling found that only 54% of respondents knew Puerto Ricans were American citizens. America finds every way to incorporate these semi-American places into the greater American union when convenient, but firmly rejects full-assimilation and rights when not. FDR made sure to emphasize that American lives had been lost in the attack on Pearl Harbor, pushing the nation into World War II, despite Hawaii being 15 years away from Statehood. American heroes like the late Senator Daniel Inouye were quick to enlist in response to their homeland being attacked. In spite of blatant racial discrimination, Japanese-Americans fought and died in the European theater for a country whose President they couldn't vote for. In the Iraq and Afghanistan wars of the early-2000s, scores of American Samoans enlisted and served their country honorably. A higher percentage of American Samoans died in these conflicts than any other regional or ethnic group. Despite this, American Samoans are still denied the basic rights of American citizenship such as an electoral-college vote or congressional representation, under the label of "non-citizen national".

The biggest takeaway from this analysis is that American territories outside the mainland states are subject exclusively to the randomness of political tides and their exploitative value to the

American empire. It is impossible for the Colonizing force to consider the best interests of the colonized; their presence alone proves it. When a Samoan, Puerto Rican, or Hawaiian volunteers to serve in an armed conflict overseas, they are greeted with open arms. That invitation however expires as soon as their use to the war effort becomes negligible. How crazy it is to consider 1,400 Japanese-Americans were scaling the cliffs of Sicily to liberate Europe from Nazi terror, when members of their own families were being imprisoned by the Government. Imagine the mental, physical, and familial sacrifice of just the average soldier sent to Iraq and Afghanistan. What hubris must our Government have to deny the most basic of democratic liberties in the face of such sacrifice?

Sovereignty, Military, Hegemony

I wrote the first section of this project with an emphasis on the historical timeline of Politics in Hawaii. While a whole book can be written solely about Hawaiian history, I give you a simplified sequence of events as I feel without those details, comprehension of the modern Sovereignty movement would be lacking. Every event, from Kamehameha's unification of the Islands, to the overthrow of the monarchy, to Statehood, is intrinsically linked through the

suffering and resilience of the Hawaiian people. While ‘Colonialism’ in the traditional sense is seen as Hegemony between nation-states and therefore theoretically erased through the State-Federal relationship of Honolulu and Washington, the evils of Imperialism have not dissipated but morphed.

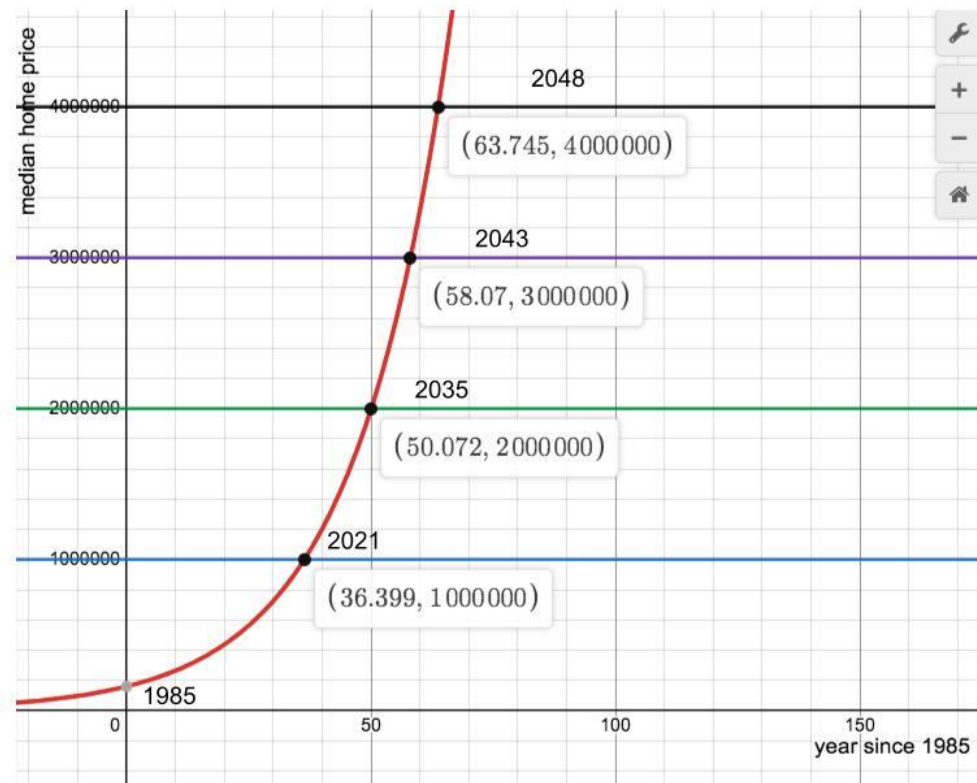
Consider the Nation of Hawaii as existing simultaneously with over a hundred years of American occupation; A people with their own language, culture, and history entirely independent of Americana. Naturally, comparisons are made between Native Hawaiians and Native Americans, both in experience and the potential for Independent institutions. However, these two cases, while both tragic and immoral, share one key deviation. The basis of Hawaii Sovereignty is the argument that fundamentally Hawaiians are not Americans. an aspirational quest towards the promise of decolonization and national sovereignty. By extension, America does not think so either. Manifest destiny and the westward expansion of US power saw Native Americans as the inferior obstacle to a greater Union, no such phenomena occurs in Hawaii. The Bard land acknowledgement notes the original stewards of this land now reside in Northeast Wisconsin, just as countless other tribes were forced to resettle. While there are no doubt there are those in the American elite who desire a similar relocation of Hawaiian peoples, American occupation has always recognized the existence of the Native population, along with Asians and other non-Hawaiians who share independent sympathies. Therefore, despite the incredible losses suffered at the hands of American influence, the resurgence of Hawaiian culture and possibility of future sovereignty remain viable. Hawaii in spirit and culture will continue as long as Hawaiians continue to live on the very land stolen from them. This is precisely why I argue the

present political moment in Hawaii poses a greater threat to the survival and independence of the Hawaiian people than at any point since the Overthrow.

The entirety of the decolonization project Hawaii could potentially undertake in the near future is reliant on the demand and existence of an idea fading by the generation. My generation, like the generation before it, will become more Americanized, Westernized, and ignorant than the one before it. The hardest pill to swallow is the realization that political independence becomes more difficult through each passing year without it. Make no mistake, amongst Native Hawaiians the realities of Imperialism have not been vanquished. Increasingly however, they have watched their population share and correlated political power diminish, turning a once Independent nation into the next Capitalist land grab of the American experiment.

Recently I spoke with a fellow graduate of my high school at a debate event on the Big Island where we discussed the disturbing trends of the housing market amongst other political issues. He explained, after years of living on the American mainland, he and his wife tried to find a home to purchase back in Hawaii to begin raising a family. What he told me was shocking: every for-sale home was either far out of budget, or had numerous cash offers over asking price from representatives of mainlands or Asian buyers. On a number of these homes, he claimed over twenty offers were placed, negating any hope he could provide his kids the security of home ownership as his parents provided for him. Unfortunately, these experiences are not isolated, but a systematic effort to once and for all remove the original inhabitants of Hawaii and replace them with the highest bidder. In my neighborhood of Manoa, a desirable upper class suburb of

Honolulu, it is rare to see a home listed under a million dollars, which has been the status quo for years now. My parents purchased our family home in 1990, for around the median home price in Hawaii at the time: \$352,000. When our property was surveyed a few years back, the land value alone surpassed a million dollars in value. Data from the Honolulu Board of Relators shows this trend magnified over three decades of recorded data. In 1985, the first year median and average home price was recorded by the Board, the median single family home price was \$158,000 with an average sale price of \$205,000. In 2022, the median home price surpassed a million for the first time in recorded history at \$1,105,000 (*Oahu Historical Data*).



The above graph shows the median home price since 1985, at the historical average increase of 5.24%. See home prices surpass a million when the x-value reaches 36, representing the year 2021. At this historical rate, the median home price will reach two million dollars by the middle of the next decade. Worse, we see due the graph shortening the length of time between each proceeding million dollar marker, meaning future home buyers face an even greater uphill battle towards homeownership the greater the status quo is unchallenged. As if the picture of native homeownership could not seem bleaker, the situation worsened for potential local buyers during the pandemic as ownership increased from International and Mainland commercial interests.

Eugene Tian, the Chief economist for the State of Hawaii, reported an alarming increase in out of town real estate purchases. Mr. Tian states home purchases by non-Residents accounted for 24% of all sales, along with 40% of all sales of neighbor island (outside of the island of Oahu) homes (*Foreign Investment in National and Local Real Estate Declined in 2020 | Hawai'i Public Radio*). What is at stake is the ability of Hawaiians to continue occupying lands they have solely cultivated, cherished, and maintained long before Europeans even discovered America. This once again returns us to the incompatibility of the Capitalist, western tradition, with the cultural Hawaiian tradition. Once Hawaii itself became a commercial entity, instead of a shared commodity, the inevitability of greed and the displacement it causes became the unfortunate reality.

On face value, the resurgence of Hawaiian culture and successes of the State of Hawaii shows an optimistic trajectory for our islands. Hawaii consistently beats the US average in a number of statistical categories including the top rank for healthcare and overall environment. Despite the

Hawaiian language being legally outlawed in 1896 along with other customs such as Hula, today the language and culture of Hawaii lives on. Hawaiian is one of languages offered in my public high school, along with many across the state. Likewise, Hula Dance continues to be a cultural staple of Hawaiian tradition through Halau's and cultural events like the Merrie Monarch Festival on Hawaii Island. Below the surface however, an unspoken war is taking place for the very right to exist in the land one belongs to. In this second section of my project, I therefore turn to the major events of the modern Hawaiian Sovereignty movement. We will begin with the 1993 protest and cultural events marking the Centennial anniversary of the overthrow. Through the testimony delivered on January 17, 1993, and the writings of influential figures such as Huanani-Kay and Millilani Trask, we see the foresight of Sovereignty leaders in predicting the exact metamorphosis modern colonialism would manifest into.

1993: the Resurgence of the Sovereignty movement

1993 not only marked one hundred years of American hegemony, but the culmination of anti-Americanism sentiment within the broader public attitude. The proceeding years starting in the 1970s saw a number of smaller resistance movements over forced land-evictions in the Honolulu area. Residents in the Kalama valley organized against their forced removal, protesting the development of upperclass housing at the expense of working-class Hawaiians. While these efforts were ultimately futile, the framework for non-violent resistance was set in motion. In 1978 the 'Protect Kaho'olawe Ohana' or PKO was founded, organizing native Hawaiians politically against a direct act of American Imperialism. Unknown to many, there is an island in the Hawaiian chain which is completely uninhabited. In 1941, the US military began using the

tiny island of Kahoolawe as a military testing ground. These tests, including the detonation of hundreds of pounds of TNT, would continue well into the 1970s causing enough destruction to break the water table and render the island uninhabitable (Trask). To this day, volunteer crews work to reverse the devastating environmental effects of military testing which continue to make the island infeasible for settlement.

Huanani-Kay Trask describes the 1993 capitol protest as an awakening of social consciousness amongst young native Hawaiians; a realization that rectifying historical wrongs through political self-determination is not an option, but a necessity. “The rising consciousness of Hawaiians regarding their historical loss and contemporary marginalized existence..led to a proliferation of Hawaiian groups, some political, some cultural, some economic, but each seeking to improve the conditions of the Native people. Trask writes in *Native Social Capital: The Case for Hawaiian Sovereignty* “.. The ultimate goal of complete and independent political autonomy from the United States may be the final step of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement, but the cultural resurgence of the Kanaka Ma’oale (original peoples of Hawaii) is as critical and revolutionary as any political action (Trask). The protests of 1993 make the inherent separation between the American Republic and Hawaiian Kingdom obvious, through the recognition of a history not rectified, and the celebration of a defiant culture which will not accept inaction.



PC: Hawaii News Now

Dr. Lilikalā Kame’eleihiwa, a senior Professor of Hawaiian Studies at the University of Hawaii Manoa, illustrates the unbreakable connection between cultural rediscovery and political sovereignty particularly in native/colonial relationships. In her writings of the 93’ protest movement in *The Journal of Pacific History* she explains the march on Downtown Honolulu on January 17, 1993 which drew in a crowd of 15,000 people, was merely the final act of native defiance during this important month. Dr. Kame’eleihiwa writes “The 17th of January march marked a culmination of events commemorating the 1893 Overthrow. It was preceded by a 24 hour religious vigil on January 3rd-4th at Kilauea Volcano to ask the fire goddess Pele for her blessings for the Hawaiian

Sovereignty movement... In between hourly ceremonies, political discussions and debate as to what form of Hawaiian sovereignty should finally take place was ongoing. (*The Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement: An Update from Honolulu (January-August 1993)* on *JSTOR*)” Unlike the Sugar Oligarchs who conspired, infiltrated, and eventually overthrew the political structure, Hawaii’s common man had to learn politics from the ground up. It took no formal political education for the average Hawaiian citizen to recognize a small minority of White, foreign business interests had uprooted their entire way of life. However, when a citizenry turns anger into organization, especially in concurrence with a cultural awakening, what occurs is more than political change, but the prerequisites for revolution.

While the expression “the victors write the History books” can apply to most conflicts and the narratives written about them, this statement rings especially true with the revised narrative of history presented to the Hawaiian people post-independence. Author and Filmmaker Tom Coffman who wrote a number of books on Hawaiian history and politics including *The Island Edge of America* and *How Hawaii changed America* describes the nature of this informational warfare as he observed in the 1960s. “In 1965..” Coffman writes “..the effective definition of history had been reduced to a few years. December 7th 1941 was particularly the beginning of time, and anything that might have happened before was prehistory. (Coffman 10–11)” Notice the stress that Coffman puts on Pearl Harbor as the centerpiece for America’s version of events. While Pearl Harbor was certainly a colossal event, particularly in the shaping of World History, its prioritization in

the historical psyche over centuries of a native cultural accounts shows exactly how the victor subverts the historical account. The American narrative centers history on the involvement of the Union within the island's broader influence, but truthfully, the history of Hawaii is mostly one independent from American influence.

While the United States of America has never faced International Criminal charges for its involvement in the illegal overthrow of a sovereign nation, the greater political events of 1993 did see the USA face indictment for these injustices. A panel of judges from around the world gathered in Hawaii, traveling to five islands, and hearing testimony from the victims of the aforementioned land-evictions. Their task was to find whether the United States was liable for the crimes of: genocide, ethnocide, the unlawful seizure of lands, and the destruction of the environment (“The Tribunal”). The judges, who came from Asia, Africa, New Zealand, and various Native American tribes, found the United States to be guilty of these crimes, and ordered all lands to be returned to the original peoples of the islands. While of course these hearings had no legal merits, it is a stunning realization that legal scholars from across the globe can recognize the clear injustices of American occupation, while the occupying power does little more than sign an official apology.

The Judges’ ruling came with two key recommendations: 1. The U.S. and the world would recognize the sovereignty and right to self determination of Lahui Kanaka Maoli (the original people of Hawaii) and 2. The U.S. and the world should acknowledge the right of Lahui Kanaka Maoli to decolonize under the provision of UN resolution 1514.

Ironic how Presidential Administrations are adamant in defending the sovereignty of citizens in Ukraine and Iraq, backed by the United Nations' empty words, and yet can't uphold the very standards they preach within their own Empires.

The Native American Experience & the Foundation of National Sovereignty

Of those It is helpful to briefly revisit the experiences and struggles of Hawaiian and Native American populations within the context of American colonization to better grasp the distinguishing dynamics of the Hawaiian case and its predicaments. The late Hawaiian Senator Daniel Inouye, who served heroically alongside other Japanese-Nisei patriots, and lost his entire left arm fighting in the European theater, dedicated a lifetime's work to ensure that Native Hawaiians achieve equal status as their Native American counterparts.

Under the Nixon administration's policy on Indian affairs, the United States during the 1970's began a commitment of Native self-determination and governance. This change in policy provided over 300 Native American tribes recognition as Nations under the United States, which also allowed for the separation of Federal and Tribal institutions. For example, the reason Casinos are found in States where gambling is outlawed is because they are permitted by the Tribe as a means of financing themselves. The same applies to law enforcement, whereby Federal Agencies and local police departments lose jurisdiction once they cross into tribal lands (Trask 72).

Senator Inouye questioned why the policy of the Nixon Administration on Native Americans did not also apply to Native Hawaiians. Native Hawaiians can easily make the case they have been victims of American expansionism, just like Native Americans. Western introduced viruses and the introduction of systems of commodification, decimated the population and local culture, in an identical way. Huanani-Kay Trask explains in *From A Native Daughter* “In the Hawaiian case, there has not been any federal recognition of a Native claim to self-government...in terms of federal policy Hawaiians are still in the state of “termination” rather than self-government. In practice, federal policy has straddled two poles, acknowledging Hawaiians as Naites.. But refusing to grant them the privileges of Native recognition.(Trask 72)”



PC: *Ka Ho'okolokolonui Kānaka Maoli*

These images are taken from the Documentary *Ka Ho'okolokolonui Kānaka Maoli* which translates to “Peoples Tribunal of Hawaii”. The 1994 film captures the entire series of events and spirit of Hawaii during the early 90’s. Another point takeaway the film explores is the connection between the Native Hawaiian and Native American experiences. Obviously, the story of a country existing before America, then being occupied, colonized, and subjugated is clearly similar, but the question of how these two simultaneous struggles connect politically is more ambiguous. Hawaiian theorists like the Trask sisters have pondered the question of what an Independent Hawaii would look like. Can we look towards the example of the Native Americans as a model of the “country within a country” or do those measures not go far enough to rectify the historical wrongs of the late 1800’s? In both the Native Hawaiian and Native American experience, the problem has always been resisting the half measures of self-governance. The Native Americans, within the US and Canada are granted a form of independence but ultimately are far from their goal of complete societal-autonomy independent of the colonial project.

Professor Glen Coulthard of the University of British Columbia, in his book *Red Skins, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* warns against a “nation-within-a-nation” approach by building on the example of first nation people’s struggles against the settler state of Canada. Professor Coulthard explains how the Canadian Government's response to cries of independence by Native groups has been one of recognition without substance. He extends Marx’s argument on ‘Primitive Accumulation’ urging the readers to think of colonialism as “a

form of structured dispossession.” The colonizer gives Native people the appearance of autonomy through the relinquishing of institutions back into native hands, yet continues a process of dispossession and subjugation. Marx’s argument of Capital’s “original sin” is a critical concept here, as it reminds us that there isn’t ever a big enough concession that a colonizing power can make to rectify its colonization. Coulthard states “..ongoing state access to the land and resources contradictorily provide the material and spiritual sustenance of Indigenous societies on the one hand, and the foundation of colonial state-formation, settlement, and capitalist development on the other. (Coulthard 160–62)” In his analysis of the Canadian Government’s relationship with indigenous groups, Coulthard provides numerous examples of how Canada is willing to “recognize” the faults of their colonial past and the rightful existence of native tribes within their borders, but never to the extent of deterring the Government’s interest.

Apply Coulthard’s analysis to the Native American example, and the situations mirror each other perfectly. The US Government recognizes the rights of Native American tribes to maintain political and institutional autonomy on Reservation lands. However, when that autonomy interferes with the Country’s commercial interests, suddenly the Government becomes much less accommodating. Coulthard uses the example of the Canadian Government’s plan to build a natural gas pipeline and hydroelectric plant on sovereign land as examples of their empty promises to the indigenous people. Similarly, the political autonomy of the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in South Dakota became national news in 2016 under nearly identical conditions. The massive commercial energy project not only violated tribal sovereignty, but would’ve run

directly over sacred burial grounds. Despite objections, mass-protests, and court challenges, the project was approved in 2017.

Furthermore, the very existence of Reservation states is proof of Coulthard's concept of "structured dispossession". America allows for autonomous nation-states to exist within itself, and even helps provide funding for institutions and social services. However, these benefits are not sovereignty at all, as clearly the Government feels entitled to violate these conditions whenever convenient. Furthermore, Coulhart's entire argument maintains that the size of the carrot dangled in front of indigenous peoples is irrelevant. The very fact a colonizing Government must offer some form of reparations can never rectify the horrors of genocide and dispossession - the original sin.

Mauna Kea and the TMT Protest

Professor Coulhart's argument of structural dispossession does not only cross-apply to indigenous groups within the "nation-within-a-nation" framework, but also to the struggles of unrecognized indigenous groups like Native Hawaiians . As previously mentioned, the Nation of

Hawaii which did not receive the basic rights package given to 300 other native groups, yet was still victimized by the Colonial hierarchy's disregard for Native rights and tradition.

The Thirty Meter Telescope project, which led to the mass protest and encampment on Mauna Kea on Hawaii's Big Island, exemplifies the colonizer's blatant disregard of native lands and culture when weighed against the economic interests of these massive construction projects.

Over the last two years, in yet another example of Government interest, an oil spill at the Red Hill Navy Base on my home island of Oahu has contaminated the water of over 100,000 local residents. These two events have revived the passion within the Sovereignty movement, as Native Hawaiians and their allies continue to see the devastation caused by a lack of autonomy and self-governance.

The Island of Hawaii (known as the 'Big Island' to most) has been at the center of a resurgent protest movement since 2014, once again proving the tireless spirit of the Native Hawaiian people. How fitting that the birthplace of King Kamehameha, the great warrior and uniter of Hawaii, has found itself at the forefront of the 21st century Sovereignty movement. I remember being on the Big Island during the summer of 2019 just as the protest movement was winding down on the site itself. The actual site of protest is breathtaking, as you would expect a sacred landmark perched on top of a volcano in Hawaii would be. There is a single two-lane highway that connects the two sides of the Big Island, which runs through the base of Mauna Kea. I remember driving past the encampment and noticing the entire roadside lit up with upside-down Hawaiian flags. In Hawaii it is common to see the State flag, which incorporates western symbolism in the form of stripes and a Union Jack, flown upside down out the bed of a truck.

The upside-down State flag is often paired with the ‘Nation of Hawaii’ flag, which uses traditional colors and a native crest in rejection of the whitewashed rendition. By the time I first witnessed the Thirty-Meter Telescope (TMT) live, the occupants who remained at the base of Mauna Kea were a small minority of this inspiring community who continued to reside permanently in solidarity. At its peak, what started as a peaceful protest movement, turned into a thriving living space with the resources of any developed city.

TMT is a fascinating case study in modern decolonial politics because it pits two groups, traditionally of shared interest, against each other in a struggle with far broader implications and significance than the mere construction itself. One does not usually see the scientific community engaged in conflict with Native-rights organizations, yet in Hawaii this has been the case for decades. Once again, the struggle to preserve Hawaii’s incredible natural resources in the Native tradition manifests itself, this time over the world’s largest mountain. Mauna Kea, measured from base to peak, is over 33,000 feet tall, in totality the tallest worldwide (although Everest has a higher altitude from sea level)(“A Sacred Space is Mauna Kea”). Contrary to Hawaii’s famously warm year-round weather, Mauna Kea reaches such an altitude, it frequently sees snowfall. The summit of Mauna Kea, measuring in just under 13,800 feet, is optimal for the observation of deep space and critical for research into the previously-unseeable reaches of our universe.

One might point out the hypocrisy in a culture who utilized the constellations in the night sky as a critical navigational tool now halting the advancement of research into such stars, but it is

important to understand the sacred nature of Mauna Kea to Native Hawaiians. Mauna Kea in Hawaiian customs, is the link between the earth and the heavens, a place ruled by the gods and therefore no construction of man could ever come before it. Mauna Kea is the site of all creation, as well as being spiritually significant it is also the sacred resting place of many Native Hawaiian ancestors. One of the TMT protesters, Kamahana Kealoha said "It's 19 stories tall, which is like building a sky-scraper on top of the mountain, a place that is being violated in many ways culturally, environmentally and spiritually. ("A Sacred Space is Mauna Kea")"

The awakening of the Sovereignty movement in light of the TMT development is a story in two-parts: the resistance to forces that threaten the cultural integrity of the Hawaiian tradition, and the replacement of invasive institutions with those aligned with such traditions. Just as the 1993 Protests were as much a cultural phenomenon as a political movement, the same can be said of the day-to-day activities of the TMT encampment. More than 80 Professors from the University of Hawaii volunteered to provide distance-learning opportunities through 160 courses at Mauna Kea. Despite the rugged conditions of the base camp, which at such a high altitude is prone to winds of up to 50mph, the TMT protesters managed to offer a multitude of impressive educational and cultural opportunities.



PC: TMT.org

This photograph of campers sitting in a group circle is more than a group hangout, these protesters are taking part in one of the many Hawaiian language classes offered during the camp's occupation. Along with language classes, Hula, traditional Hawaiian dance, was both taught and performed during the duration of the stay. These cultural practices draw parallels to the 1993 protest, which started with a traditional blessing through Hula dance, and continued with a days of performances by the States top hula schools (called Halaus). What is at stake in the TMT protest is not just a fight to determine the destiny of Hawaii's sacred lands, but a deep concern for language and culture once banned by the American occupiers. Kumu Hula (Chief Dance teacher) Kumu Hula Kawaikapuokalani Hewett, summed up this cultural resurgence stating "My kuleana (responsibility) is to write, to educate. .. This whole movement is

remarkable that all the Hawaiian people are coming together, and rightfully so because this is their very genealogy. We all descend from the piko of Wākea. (*Mauna Kea Protests: What's at Stake for Native Hawaiians - Vox*)” Kumu Hewett uses the word piko, which translates literally to “ambilical cord” to remind us that sovereignty and culture are one and the same to the Native Hawaiian people.

Along with classes, the protesters at Mauna Kea’s base found their own means of replacing the services typically offered by the Government. These included tents serving hot meals, recycling services, and even crossing-guards who managed the flow of cars passing through the camp. Unintentionally, the TMT movement showed the potentiality of a Hawaii and Hawaiian self-determination without the standard American civil-services our State has become accustomed to. These alternative institutions provide a mirror to the incompatibility of Hawaii’s cultural heritage with western assimilation. For example, despite Hawaiian being an official language of the State, the vast majority of people speak only English. The ‘H-Power’ system, which incinerates the majority of the Islands recycling for energy, is contrasted with sustainable practices of re-use and environmental protection. The ability of the sovereignty movement to not only replace societal institutions with their indigenous alternatives, but superior ones, shows what a Hawaii without America can in fact be.

The Fight Continues in Red Hill

Since 2014, there have been over 400 complaints filed by citizens in the Red Hill area on the western side of Honolulu, reporting smells of gasoline coming from the drinking water (Nast) . These smells and the subsequent health issues are the result of 14,000 gallons of fuel and water leaking from the suppression system at the US Navy Base in Red Hill(*Hawai'i Department of Health Advises Navy Water System Consumers Not to Drink, Consume Tap Water 1*)

Despite the Navy's claims that the drinking water is safe, the contamination from the spill has caused a number of health concerns. Reports of headaches, rashes, and nausea, amongst other symptoms negate these false statements from the military. Conditions have gotten so bad that the Hawaii Department of Health warned anyone connected to the Navy's water systems to avoid using the water for drinking, cooking, and oral hygiene.

As if the situation could now worsen, it is now apparent that the Military leadership at Red Hill is complicit in a cover-up of the situation. As reported by the Honolulu Civil Beat, the contamination may be up to 20,000 gallons of fuel as of 2021, despite the initial estimates from the military of just 1,000 gallons (Nast). The Navy's fuel operation has long been a subject of public scrutiny, and environmental groups such as the Hawaii Chapter of the Sierra Club, expressed concerns over the potential for contamination prior to the initial spill in 2014. Despite the vast body of evidence, from water testing, to personal testimony, and 2021 warning produced jointly by the State and EPA, the military continues to downplay the events. Internal reports from Navy Admiral Christopher Cavanaugh revealed the cause of the spill was not simply "human error" as the Navy first reported. His review found a shocking lack of oversight. The Cavanaugh

report describes the Navy Base's leadership as "a culture of complacency" evidenced by the commanding officer removing oversight on day-to-day operations (Waters).

Naturally, the public outcry has been strong, as not only is the military clearly complicit in a major public health disaster, but their antics continue to cause rifts between the military and Hawaiian communities. Calls for demilitarization has long been a core policy of the sovereignty movement, however it is clear to the Hawaiian community that the military presence is not only a reminder of American hegemony, but also a fundamental threat to the health and security of local people. Bronson Azama, a Hawaii climate activist sums it up best in an Op-ed for Teen Vogue writing "Although there is an economic addiction to militarism in Hawai'i, we should not allow it to diminish the ability of future generations to be able to drink and eat from lands that have sustained our people for over 2,000 years" (Nast). What is clear to the Native people of Hawaii is that there is a major difference between the military's desire to disavow their negligence and the communities emphasis on sustainable living and the protection of the natural habitat.

Conclusion:

In the face of this long history of exploitation, stretching from the first arrival of Western civilization to the on-going poisoning of water used by almost 100,000 people, is there any doubt that there is something inherently wrong with Hawaii being a part of the United States of America? One of the most enraging arguments I have seen is when Americans come to Hawaii, either on vacation or permanently, and complain about the "hostility" that they face from local

people. What ignorance is it to treat an Independent country, stolen from it's original inhabitants and so frequently disrespected by its overlords, as a place where you should be welcomed with open arms.

There are only eight islands in the Hawaiian chain, and yet one of those remains entirely uninhabited because the US Military dropped hundreds of pounds of TNT on Kohoolawe destroying the possibility of human habitation. We talk about the destruction of the environment as a side effect of American hegemony, but the destruction of the way of life for Native Hawaiians is fundamentally a question of survival.

Drawing on the Coulthart readings, examples of other sovereign nations within the American project, and the experience of Native Hawaiians, it is hard to find a positive conclusion to this question. Whether or not we achieve sovereignty is no longer the main question. Even if we do, who will make up the population of Hawaii when that happens? Who will be able to afford a three-million dollar home in 2050? The political history of Hawaii is simultaneously the history of American exploitation, the evolution of capitalism, and the study of pseudo-independence for Native populations. Without a significant change to the political status quo, I remain pessimistic that the Native spirit will ever retain the Independence they deserve, and which has been stolen for over a hundred years.

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