

THE ANNEXATION OF HAWAII:
HOW THE PEOPLE OF THE SANDWICH ISLANDS
WERE SILENCED

The United States has annexed more than a few territories, but one of the most debated was that of the Hawaiian Islands. Originally an independent kingdom, the Hawaiian Islands were officially annexed on July 12, 1898, for a myriad of reasons. Since then, there have been different arguments on how that affected the Hawaiian people and the land they reside on. The annexation of Hawaii was detrimental to its people and culture as it became a central hub for American military operations, permanently altered the environment and economy, destroyed national consciousness, and increased health problems.

The annexation of Hawaii took place, after many failed attempts in prior years, due to the blanketed fear of a Japanese invasion. For many years, Honolulu, on the island of Oahu, was a halfway point port of trade of coal between America and China. In 1887, the Reciprocity Treaty was ratified, giving the United States the right to use the harbor of Pearl River for coal trade and repairing their ships.¹ Pearl Harbor was, in fact, the only harbor in the islands that could be defended solely from the shore. In 1893, 162 United States Marines landed in Hawaii to help white businessmen, led by the U.S. Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time, with the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy.² These businessmen called themselves the Republic of Hawaii, much to the dismay of many indigenous Hawaiians and their monarch, Queen Liliuokalani.³

Cultural superiority is sometimes reinforced by the concept of military superiority. Hawaii has the highest number of military bases of any state in the U.S., eleven in total. Oahu has the most, with each branch having at least one of its own. The first military base to be

¹ Kees Van Dijk, "The Failed Annexation of Hawaii", in *Pacific Strife* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), 366.

² Roy Takumi, "Challenging U.S. Militarism in Hawai'i and Okinawa," *Race, Poverty & the Environment* 4/5, no. 4/1 (1994): 8, www.jstor.org/stable/41555279.

³ J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, "'For Get' Hawaiian Entitlement: Configurations of Land, 'Blood', and Americanization in the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1921," *Social Text*, no. 59 (1999): 125. www.jstor.org/stable/466700.

erected on any of the Hawaiian Islands was Fort Shafter Army Base, built in 1907. Starting at the beginning of World War II, The United States Navy used the island of Kaho'olawe for target practice, and throughout the duration of the Vietnam War, a total of 2,500 tons of bombs were dropped on the island, the "most bombed island in the Pacific."⁴ Though the island is the smallest, and completely uninhabited, this brought outrage to the Hawaiian people, as each island has its own cultural and historic value. Much like the occupation of Alcatraz in San Francisco by the American Indian Movement in 1969, a group of Hawaiians landed on and claimed Kaho'olawe despite it being prohibited to civilians. Though they were eventually removed, it was occupied many more times, which ultimately coerced the Navy to allow its civilian use. The island was then put into the administrative hands of the, "sovereign native Hawaiian entity upon its recognition by the United States and the State of Hawai'i."⁵

Due to this, and Hawaii's abundance of sugar, there was a flood of white settlers, who almost completely took over sugar production. Japanese and Chinese immigrants followed, becoming a large part of the working force in the sugar industry. Originally, the Hawaiian Islands were farmed using irrigated and dryland agriculture techniques, but once the U.S. caught wind of the propensity of sugar, that all changed.⁶ The landscape was forever changed due to the U.S.'s need to control their surroundings. Traditionally, cane sugar was used by Hawaiians to support the growth of their staple crops,

⁴ Mansel G. Blackford, "Environmental Justice, Native Rights, Tourism, and Opposition to Military Control: The Case of Kaho'olawe," *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 2 (2004): 544. doi:10.2307/3660711.

⁵ Michael K. Dudley and Keoni Kagard, *A Call for Hawaiian Sovereignty*. (Honolulu, HI: Nā Kāne O Ka Malo Press, 1990), 109.

⁶ Carol MacLennan, "The Mark of Sugar. Hawai'i's Eco-Industrial Heritage." 37. *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 29, no. 3 (109) (2004): 37. www.jstor.org/stable/20761975.

act[ing] as windbreak and absorbed taro paddies' seepage...rows of cane planted between fields and perpendicular to the trade winds pulled moisture from the air and onto the upward sides of their fields, effectively irrigating taro and sweet potatoes planted amid the sugar cane.⁷

The industrial plantation system permanently changed the, "forests, water supply, [and] human and animal landscape."⁸

Clearing an exponential amount of land for sugarcane was a common practice, and in the early 1860s, the Hawaiian government put up a sizeable plot of land for sale in the central plain of Maui. It was bought by foreigners and cleared for farming sugarcane.⁹ A lease arrangement was put in place for use of the chief, crown, and government lands, one that could last from 25 to 50 years. Once again, foreigners came to lease the land for sugarcane production, and there were few restrictions put in place. Hawaiians with small plots of land used this lease arrangement with plantations as means of income, but they were eventually bought out by plantation owners.¹⁰ It had become evident with the Bayonet Constitution in 1887 that they had completely lost control over their land. The Hawaiian people were only allowed to vote if they had an, "income of one hundred dollars per year or taxable property worth three thousand dollars."¹¹ This excluded every two out of three Hawaiian voters.¹² Not only were they unable to use and make an income off of their own land anymore, they were unable to vote any leadership into the government that could change the system in which they were living.

⁷ Lawrence H. Kessler, "A Plantation upon a Hill; Or, Sugar without Rum: Hawai'i's Missionaries and the Founding of the Sugarcane Plantation System." *Pacific Historical Review* 84, no. 2 (2015): 137. doi:10.1525/phr.2015.84.2.129.

⁸ MacLennan, *The Mark of Sugar*: 37.

⁹ MacLennan, *The Mark of Sugar*: 53.

¹⁰ MacLennan, *The Mark of Sugar*: 53.

¹¹ MacLennan, *The Mark of Sugar*: 53.

¹² MacLennan, *The Mark of Sugar*: 53.

The forest on the Hawaiian Islands helped catch the rainfall that watered pre-plantation sugarcane farms, and clearing that forest to farm more sugarcane caused many periods of drought which slowed the growth and harvest of sugarcane.¹³ Eventually, the Hawaiian Agriculture Society was formed and built two nurseries to help replant the forests that had been cleared.¹⁴ Protection of the forest and the watershed was proven extremely important, and by 1920, reforestation efforts by, “plantations and ranches in 1919 to 1920 (mostly alien species) resulted in over 1 million trees planted.”¹⁵ Despite their best efforts, the islands were forever changed.

Because the need for work on the sugar plantations outweighed the number of people residing on the islands, an estimated 400,000 men, women, and children were brought to the islands from neighboring countries.¹⁶ After the need for them on plantations dwindled, many of them stayed on the island and intermarried with Hawaiians. As of 1997, around 5,000 of the 240,000 Hawaiians that remained were full blooded.¹⁷ Slowly, those of more Asian descent were having a more significant day to day influence than those of Hawaiian descent. This brings up the issue of how much Hawaiian is Hawaiian? What is the definition of Hawaiian? Therefore, the blood quantum was instilled. A person of Hawaiian ancestry needs at least 50% Hawaiian blood to be considered native.¹⁸ The blood quantum comes into play when asked who qualifies to reap the benefits of reparations, whether it be land or money.

¹³ MacLennan, *The Mark of Sugar*: 55.

¹⁴ MacLennan, *The Mark of Sugar*: 56.

¹⁵ MacLennan, *The Mark of Sugar*: 58.

¹⁶ Norman Meller and Anne Feder Lee. “Hawaiian Sovereignty.” *Publius* 27, no. 2 (1997): 169. www.jstor.org/stable/3330643.

¹⁷ Meller and Lee, *Hawaiian Sovereignty*: 170.

¹⁸ Kauanui, “*For Get*” *Hawaiian Entitlement*: 127.

Before statehood in 1921, Congress set aside 200,000 acres “to be used for Hawaiian rehabilitation under The Hawaiian Homes Commission Act (HHCA).”¹⁹ Only a few of those considered qualified Hawaiians had been able to acquire any of the land, due to the fact that it was unsuitable for homesteading, and the state lacked funding for rehabilitation of the land. Because of this, Hawaii wanted to adopt the HHCA as part of their state constitution. The HHCA was supposed to fulfill obligations that the state had to the people of Hawaii, but instead, reparations were never actualized. The blood quantum previously mentioned is what constituted “qualified Hawaiians.” The trouble is, all Hawaiians, 50% or not, were affected by the land lease. The blood quantum created an idea of class separation among congressional members discussing who would be recipients of land. “‘Part-Hawaiians’ were a threat because of their supposed aggressive and enterprising nature.”²⁰ This turned the focus onto individuals and certain families, instead of Hawaiians as a whole. The blood quantum became associated with class privilege, instead of empowering Hawaiians by giving their native land back to them. Congress was deciding who was blood qualified and entitled to the land that the HHCA controlled. The quantum also lowered the number of people that were eligible for the land allotment, because not many people remained with that high of an amount of Hawaiian blood.²¹

In the 1960s and 70s, a man named Henry J. Kaiser created a suburb in Honolulu. Modern suburban America was placed in the southeast corner of Oahu, soon to be followed by the Kalama Valley, which was full of, “pig farmers, junked cars, and poor people, by one count sixty-seven families living in broken-down shacks.”²² When Kaiser came in, some of those

¹⁹ Meller and Lee, *Hawaiian Sovereignty*: 172.

²⁰ Kauanui, “*For Get*” *Hawaiian Entitlement*: 132.

²¹ Kauanui, “*For Get*” *Hawaiian Entitlement*: 135.

²² Samuel P. King, and Randall W. Roth, *Newfound Wealth, Cultural Rebirth, Seeds of Discontent*. In *Broken Trust: Greed, Mismanagement & Political Manipulation at America’s Largest Charitable Trust* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 61.

families left voluntarily, while others remained. *Huli*, which means, “overthrow”, was the chant of Kōkua Kalama, a community group that formed in resistance against the bulldozers that began leveling their home. While most knew that Kaiser would win due to monetary resources, Kōkua Kalama fought with, “civil disobedience, tours of the ‘disaster area’ for reporters and the public, a protest and sit-in at the Capitol, occupations of the pigpens, and defiance of the bulldozers.”²³ Kōkua Kalama was accused of trespassing, as the land had been bought out, so police were sent in. Kōkua Kalama was entirely peaceful, letting the police arrest them without provoking violence. The protesters sang the song “The Sons of Hawai’i” while being slowly arrested, and curse was then placed on the land.²⁴ The urbanization of Kalama Valley was called, “progress”, and “progress did not always benefit everyone, and that was unfortunate.”²⁵

“The Hawaiian culture, its mortality, and its values were demeaned through the imposition of Christianity by Western missionaries and the Western values of foreigners coming to and settling in the islands.”²⁶ Hawaii soon became inundated with clergymen, becoming the “land of missionaries”, and Protestantism was declared its state religion in 1824. “Foreign disregard for the Hawaiian religion, known as the *kapu* system, undermined the fabric of Sandwich island society, causing cultural dissolution.”²⁷ Traditionally, Hawaiian religion, known as the *kapu* system and better expressed as spirituality, is deeply based in the metaphysical.²⁸ The *kapu* system was a religio-political system that essentially made the chiefs gods on earth, and if

²³ King and Roth, *Newfound Wealth*, 62.

²⁴ King and Roth, *Newfound Wealth*, 62.

²⁵ King and Roth, *Newfound Wealth*, 62.

²⁶ Sam L. No’eau Warner. “‘Kuleana’: The Right, Responsibility, and Authority of Indigenous Peoples to Speak and Make Decisions for Themselves in Language and Cultural Revitalization.” *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (1999): 70. www.jstor.org/stable/3195982.

²⁷ Jennifer Fish Kashay. “From Kapus to Christianity: The Disestablishment of the Hawaiian Religion and Chiefly Appropriation of Calvinist Christianity.” *Western Historical Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (2008): 178. doi:10.2307/25443647.

²⁸ Meller and Lee. *Hawaiian Sovereignty*: 169.

anyone tried to break the separation between the chiefs and commoners, they were met with death. There was an extremely distinct separation between men and women, as women were seen as defilers of men.²⁹ When the first Western settlers arrived in 1778 with Captain Cook, Hawaiian women established sexual relations with white men and dined with them as well, hoping to gain their *mana*, or possession of the spiritual life force energy that spreads throughout the universe.³⁰ Women were tabooed from eating certain things, and from gaining full political power.³¹ After 1778, they more readily broke the taboos in the presence of westerners, because they were far less likely to report them to the chiefs due to them being unaware of the customs. This began the slow collapse *kapu* system, as punishments happened far less regularly.

When Captain Cook and his men arrived, they brought sexually transmitted diseases along with them.³² This caused sterility, which contributed to the decline in the Native Hawaiian population. Seeing that their numbers were dwindling, the Hawaiian people felt betrayed by their gods. Eventually, the chief was pressured into overthrowing the *kapu* system in 1819.³³ *Hula* was banned when 1830 because Protestants viewed it as “the incarnation of everything that was evil about Hawaiian living.”³⁴ While many Hawaiian chiefs and their families converted to Christianity, they saved *hula* for a part in royal observances. However, *hula* came back in full force in the 1960s.³⁵ It became a large part of the tourism industry that so quickly took over the Hawaiian economy after statehood in 1959.

Following the invasion of U.S. marines and white businessmen, the Hawaiian language was banned as a means of instruction in public schools. It was later further enforced after the

²⁹ Kashay, *From Kapus to Christianity*: 19.

³⁰ Kashay, *From Kapus to Christianity*: 19.

³¹ Kashay, *From Kapus to Christianity*: 19.

³² Kashay, *From Kapus to Christianity*: 24 .

³³ Kashay, *From Kapus to Christianity*: 25.

³⁴ King and Roth, *Newfound Wealth*, 55.

³⁵ King and Roth, *Newfound Wealth*, 55.

1898 annexation. “Although, the law stated that English was required as the medium of instruction for not less than 50 percent of the school day, English was the only language allowed in the schools.”³⁶ Corporal punishment was used to enforce the ban. The idea, called Americanization, was that the English language would create upward mobility and further the assimilation into the American culture that would soon completely overtake the Hawaiian Islands. Americanization is a terminal sentence to a culture, as it creates what is known as language death. Language is what perpetuates a culture, gives it the path it needs to be passed on, therefore the death of a language is the beginning stage of the death of a culture.

Hawaiians have the highest health risks among any of the people that live on the Hawaiian Islands, as they are more susceptible to a higher rate of disease because they have not had a proper amount of time to naturally build up their immune system like their Caucasian counterparts. King Kamehameha II created a board of public health in 1850 due to the influx of foreign diseases with the invasion of Captain Cook in 1778.³⁷ These diseases included smallpox, influenza, cholera, measles, tuberculosis, and venereal disease. These diseases caused the population at the time to drop from 500,000 to less than 60,000. According to the Public Health Records in 1961, all babies born on the islands are immunized against the highest amount of diseases than any other state in America. There is a wealth disparity between Native Hawaiians and Caucasians that leads to a great lack of access to health care due to a which increases the probability of “diseases and ailments, early disability, and premature death.”³⁸ According to the

³⁶ Warner, *"Kuleana"*: 70.

³⁷ Mary Kawena Pukui Wahi I Ka Paipala, “Hawaiian Health: Ola Kino.” *Public Health Reports* (1896-1970) 76, no. 12 (1961): 1064. doi:10.2307/4591375.

³⁸ Mark Eshima, *Native Hawaiian Data Book 1996. (Honolulu, HI: Office of Hawaiian Affairs, 1996)*

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the leading causes of death for Native Hawaiians are cancer, heart disease, accidental injuries, stroke and diabetes.³⁹

The annexation of Hawaii did more to widen the divide between its people and those of the mainland, than it did to help it. A large U.S. military presence coupled with a lack of ownership over their own lands, though altered by years of sugar plantation practices, it would be hard to feel like one belongs in their native lands. When the HHCA came to fruition, all seemed as if reparations would be paid as a solution. However, when the land was only given to Hawaiian people of a certain blood percentage, it seemed to separate the people more than rehabilitate them. When the Hawaiian Islands were annexed in 1898, the lasting impact it would have on the its people were unforeseen, but vast.

³⁹ Lindsey Hixson, Bradford B. Hepler, and Myoung Ouk Kim, *The Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander Population: 2010*. 2010 Census Briefs.

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