

# One Hundred Years of Colonization in Hawaii

Poka Laenui

Hawaii  
U.S.A.

The year 1993, which marks the hundredth anniversary of the dispossession of native Hawaiians of their land and their sovereignty, is a year for the solemn contemplation of some compelling questions about the true nature of the United States as a nation and a democracy. At the 'Iolani Palace, on January 17, 1993, over 10,000 Hawaiians and members of the Christian Church (the legacy of early Hawaiian missionaries) participated in a peaceful commemoration of the events of a century ago. It was a period of mourning and of addressing the history of 100 years of criminal colonization, a time for Christian apology, a period to wipe the tears and to step into the dream time, a necessity for decolonization ever to take place.

In 1893, on January 16, U.S. Marines landed in what was then peaceful Hawaii, armed with Gatling guns, Howitzer cannons, double cartridge belts filled with ammunition, carbines and other instruments of war. The troops marched along the streets of Honolulu, rifles facing the 'Iolani Palace, the seat of Hawaii's sovereign government. The following day, 18 resident conspirators, mostly Americans by birth, sneaked to the back steps of a government building a few yards from where the American troops had purposely lodged the night before. There, Henry Cooper, an American lawyer and resident of Hawaii for less than a year, proclaimed that he and a handful of others were the "provisional government" of Hawaii, their explicit purpose being to annex Hawaii to the United States.

American Minister Plenipotentiary John L. Stevens immediately gave official recognition to the "provisional government" and then joined in its demand that Queen Lilioukalani, the constitutional monarch of the Hawaiian nation, surrender under threat of war with the United States. The Queen eventually capitulated, but not without protest. She declared:

I, Lilioukalani, by the grace of God and under the Constitution of the Hawaiian Kingdom, Queen, do hereby solemnly protest against any and all acts done against myself and the Constitutional

Government of the Hawaiian Kingdom by certain persons claiming to have established a provisional government of and for this kingdom.

That I yield to the superior force of the United States of America, whose minister plenipotentiary, his excellency John L. Stevens, has caused United States troops to be landed at Honolulu and declared that he would support the provisional government.

Now to avoid any collision of armed forces and perhaps the loss of life, I do, under this protest, and impelled by said force, yield my authority until such time as the Government of the United States shall, upon the facts being presented to it, undo the action of its representative and reinstate me and the authority which I claim as the constitutional sovereign of the Hawaiian Islands.

After taking office a few months later, President Cleveland assigned a special minister to Hawaii to investigate the situation. Outraged by what he learned, in December 18, 1893, he addressed both houses of Congress on the matter, stating:

By an act of war, committed with the participation of a diplomatic representative of the United States and without authority of Congress, the government of a feeble but friendly and confiding people has been overthrown. A substantial wrong has thus been done, which a due regard for our national character, as well as the rights of the injured people, requires we should endeavor to repair....

... but for the lawless occupation of Honolulu under false pretexts by the United States forces, and but for Minister Stevens' recognition of the provisional government when the United States forces were its sole support and constituted its only military strength, the Queen and her Government would never have yielded to the provisional government, even for a time and for the sole purpose of submitting

her case to the enlightened justice of the United States.

Cleveland refused to accept Hawaii as a U.S. territory. The provisional government simply waited Cleveland out. President McKinley subsequently took office, signed a "treaty of annexation" with the provisional government, which, while waiting out Cleveland, had changed its name to the Republic of Hawaii. McKinley, knowing quite well that he could not obtain the two-thirds vote in the Senate required by the U.S. Constitution to ratify this treaty, instead forwarded it to the Joint Houses of Congress as a resolution, requiring a mere majority in both houses. The Congress accepted the treaty by joint resolution and Hawaii was thus declared to be a U.S. possession.

The Hawaiian nation, previously recognized in the international community as a sovereign state, with treaties and executive agreements around the world (including at least five such treaties with the United States), possessing a literacy rate among the highest in the world (far in advance of the United States at the time), and made up of a multi-racial, multi-ethnic citizenry, became a colony possessed and controlled by the United States.

The resident conspirators of Hawaii were then able to sell Hawaiian sugar in U.S. markets without having to pay foreign import tariffs. Sugar became king in Hawaii; everything sugar touched it controlled. Banking, utilities, shipping, politics and communications were all under the control of the "Big Five" corporations with interlocking directorates tied to sugar.

The U.S. military took the choicest parts of Hawaii for naval bases and made Hawaii an American Pacific fortress, part of the military strategy of "out-basing." Hawaii's citizens were automatically made U.S. citizens, prodded to drop their own identities and to accept "Americanism." Schools became recycling institutions for ripping out native identities and replacing them with American identities. Students were told to drop their indigenous names

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and take up American names, to speak English and not "that foreign language" (Hawaiian), to pledge allegiance to the American flag and sing its national anthem, to profess that if America had not come to protect them, they would have all been speaking a foreign language imposed by a foreign invader (!).

"Hawaiian" was understood to identify a race rather than a nationality. The Europeans, North Americans, Orientals and Pacific Islanders who had previously become Hawaiian citizens lost their national identity. The United States regulated immigration and transmigrated U.S. citizens without limit to Hawaii. The United States controlled foreign trade and made Hawaii into a captive market. Hawaii was run as a military camp. Every aspect of Hawaii was Americanized. Military show of strength was constant. Trade was totally controlled. Education and media were regulated. Hawaii, a melting pot of cultures, races, languages and lore changed from a reality to an advertising slogan for politicians and merchants.

Finally, in 1959, after three generations of colonial rule, Hawaiians were given the chance to become "equal Americans." The United States placed the following question to the "qualified voters" of Hawaii (Americans who were residents of Hawaii for at least one year): "Shall Hawaii immediately be admitted into the Union as a state?" (The Admission Act of March 18, 1959, PL 86-3, 73 Stat 4). They voted overwhelmingly to make Hawaii a state.

During the 1960s and beyond, native Hawaiians witnessed the emergence of pride in cultural identity among blacks, Chicanos and American Indians of the U.S. mainland. They witnessed the fallibility of the great American nation in the Vietnam War. They witnessed the liberation of independent states in the Pacific, starting with Western Samoa, in 1962, followed by others like Fiji, Nauru, Tuvalu, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Cook Islands, Niue and Vanuatu, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia. Most of these independent decolonized states gained seats in the United Nations.

So the questions emerge: What about Hawaii? Are Hawaiians entitled to self-determination? Was that right "consumed" in 1959, such that a referendum cannot now be placed legitimately before the Ha-

waiian people? If the inalienability of self-determination requires that there can be no such "consumption" or if the plebiscite in 1959 constituted a fraud such that there was no true exercise of self-determination, how would self-determination be practiced today, following one hundred years of U.S. colonial rule?

Who would constitute the "self" to exercise determination? Would it be by racial definition, in which only the descendants of the native Hawaiians would qualify? Would it be all descendants of the citizens of the Hawaiian nation, irrespective of race? Would it consist of a wider category of "eligible" citizens, of people who are willing to avow singular loyalty to Hawaii as a nation and disclaim allegiance to any other nation? Would the "self" include any citizen of the United States who had lived in Hawaii for at least one year?

Once the "self" is identified, what choices should be available for Hawaii under the concept of self-determination? Under a widely accepted view of U.S. law and history, Hawaii would not be permitted to "secede" from the United States. Therefore, the question would be to what extent should Hawaii's native people be given special regard for some sense of "autonomy," to be called a "tribe," a "nation within a nation," or a "federally recognized entity," etc.

Another view, however, extends the range of relevant options far beyond the limits of U.S. law. Under that view, the United States is not exempt from international law. The United Nations has spoken clearly that the choices to be given a

non-self-governing territory should range from integration within the metropolitan country, free association with that country, or emergence as an independent state.

The concept of Hawaiian independence is supported by principles of international law. The right to independence is underlined by the recent liberation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, which initiated the breakup of the Soviet Union. Under an independent Hawaiian state, native Hawaiians could have rights as indigenous people fully respected, while the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all people, irrespective of their racial, ethnic or national origins would be given proper recognition.

Hawaii will therefore be an interesting place to watch in 1993. This year calls special attention to the circumstances of indigenous peoples around the world, due to the United Nations proclamation as the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples. It juxtaposes the continuing international call for decolonization in the world with the internationally developing right of indigenous peoples to the integrity of their government, culture, language and territorial jurisdiction.

How will these fundamental issues be resolved? Will Hawaii's independence advocates resort to arms or will they continue to abide by the peaceful path laid out by Queen Lilioukalani in 1893? Will Christian Americans heed the queen's call for justice made so eloquently at the beginning of this 100-year chapter of Hawaiian colonization?

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