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Exploring Hawaiian Sovereignty: "The Sovereignty Issue"

By Anthony Castanka

Editor's Note: The views expressed in this article are those of the writer and may not necessarily reflect those of the Hawaii Pacific Press. The grammar, punctuation and usage are also the writer's.

Writer's Note: This is the final article of our series on Hawaiian sovereignty. With January 17, 1993, marking the 100th anniversary of the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, HPP has been examining and providing its readers with some background of this issue. We've attempted this by providing a historical account of Hawai'i's past beginning with the original Polynesians to settle here. We've focused also on Captain Cook, Kamehameha the Great, American missionary influence and events and criticisms regarding the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani. Although we have discovered Hawai'i's history to be rich in content and value, we realize there is much more that could be written. We hope we have been able to shed a little more light on where we live today.



Queen Lili'uokalani

The "Provisional Government" with Sanford Dole at the helm, proclaimed the Constitution; and the "Republic of Hawaii" was created on July 4, 1894. "When William McKinley replaced Cleveland as President," as Hayden Burgess of the Institute for the Advancement of Hawaiian Affairs, in a Collection of Papers on Hawaiian Sovereignty and Self-Determination, has written, "Dole's group rushed to Washington to complete the conspiracy. With a 'Constitution' in hand declaring they governed Hawaii, the 'Republic of Hawaii' ceded 'absolutely and without reserve to the United States of America all rights of sovereignty of whatsoever kind in and over the Hawaiian Islands..." (p. 10). McKinley signed the treaty of annexation, but Dole and company had to settle for only a joint resolution of Congress, since the treaty would not have received the 2/3 majority approval in the Senate required by the U. S. Constitution. The government of the "Territory of Hawaii" was established soon after the "Newlands Resolution" of July 7, 1898, was passed (Burgess p. 10).

Since this period in Hawaiian history till even today, most native Hawaiians and non-Hawaiian citizens and residents of Hawai'i have continued to be completely misled and deceived by the U. S. Gov-

ernment. "A massive brainwashing program was begun to convince Hawaiians that the United States was the legitimate ruler and that the Hawaiians were no longer Hawaiians but Americans. The term Hawaiian was redefined as a racial rather than a national term. Large numbers of citizens of Hawaii were identified no longer as Hawaiians but as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, English, Samoan, Filipino, etc. The divide and conquer tactic was employed even among the Hawaiian race, when Congress defined 'native Hawaiians' (at least 50 percent of the aboriginal blood), entitled to special land privileges while depriving others of lesser 'blood'" (Burgess p. 11).

The evolution of time has brought us to this point in history. Today is an exciting period but also one of great uncertainty. The end of the "cold war" has signaled tremendous changes across the globe. The break-up of the Soviet Union, the Yugoslavian conflict, superpower ties to third world nations...have created enormous problems. The people in many of these troubled areas are calling for a return to the

past; when they were once a sovereign people and citizens of sovereign nations. Today, this call for sovereignty has been echoed even here at home among the native Hawaiian community.

Sovereignty among native Hawaiians began to re-emerge back in the 1970's with the contentious issue of Kaho'olawe. Massive bombing campaigns by the U. S. military and abuse of the 'aina led many native Hawaiians to fight back for the rightful return of their island. The Sand Island ceded land dispute of 1980 and island music of the '70's and '80's further fueled native Hawaiian pride and determination. Environmental concerns and preservation of lands have been at the heart of the Hawaiian sovereignty movement. Nevertheless, the movement is still relatively new and developing.

There are approximately 8-12 organized sovereignty groups throughout the islands. However, this number is deceptive, according to Hayden Burgess in a recent interview. He explains how various civic groups and activities such as hula halaus, canoe clubs, the teaching of songs and chants, and certainly the voyages of the Hokule'a... indirectly influence people's attitudes towards sovereignty. Yet, despite this trend, each organized sovereignty group has its own variation in its interpretation of sovereignty. In addition, there are various models of sovereignty advocated, two of which we will primarily examine: the "nation-within-a-nation" and the "nation-to-nation" models of sovereignty.

Sovereignty, once again defined, is the right possessed by a people sharing a common culture, religion, language, value system and land base, to exercise control and make all decisions regarding itself and its territory, free from outside interference. It is the right native Hawaiians had enjoyed within their own culture and society before United States intervention brought about the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom in 1893.

Native Hawaiians state that sovereignty is not something which can be given to them. They cannot receive sovereignty—they can only assert it, or give it up. Because native Hawaiians were never allowed to vote on the Republic or annexation as a Territory, and were denied the opportunity to vote separately on statehood, they have never voluntarily surrendered their sovereignty.

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ALA MOANA



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The Office of Hawaiian Affairs Committee on Sovereignty recently held a series of panel discussions on various models of sovereignty. Pearl Leialoha Page, assistant editor for OHA's newspaper *Ka Wai Ola O Oha*, reported on the models presented by a number of Hawaiian sovereignty groups.

Ka Lahui Hawai'i has been a model "nation-within-a-nation" since 1987. This concept of sovereignty is similar to that of reservation lands controlled by native American Indians. Page writes that Ka Lahui has held three constitutional conventions and consists of 250 delegates representing 12,000 citizens, as voiced by Mililani Trask, governor of the group. It is comprised of executive, judicial and legislative branches of government which are elected and subject to recall by the people of Ka Lahui

Trask also stated that Ka Lahui is "dedicated to peace and disarmament and an absolute faith in equity and justice. 'We will not practice violence, not in our homes, against ourselves or our children and not in our communities. And we will no longer tolerate military bases on Hawaiian trust lands, not on ceded lands and not on the Hawaiian Home Lands'" (Page).

In an interview with UH Hawaiian Studies assistant professor and Ph. D. candidate Terry Young, I asked him about the many problems native American Indians have experienced modeling the "nation-within-a-nation" concept, such as the high levels of unemployment, alcohol abuse and domestic violence. Young, also a citizen of Ka Lahui, responded by saying, "We would research and study into these problems to benefit from native Indian mistakes." Regarding land utilization, he added, "We would



Peggy Ha'o Ross, founder of 'Ohana 'O Hawai'i, expressed her group's vision of sovereignty at a recent series of community meetings and discussions held by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs Committee on Sovereignty. (Office of Hawaiian Affairs photo)

recreate the best of native lands by combining nature, tradition and environmentalism with 21st century technology, business and free-market economics." This progressive approach to sovereignty is quite a contrast from misconceptions about native Hawaiians wanting to "turn the clock back" 200 years.

The panel discussion also represented Kekuni Blaisdell, founder of Ka Pakaukau, a union of 12 grassroot native Hawaiian organizations. Blaisdell expressed strong arguments in favor of sovereignty as Page writes, "Hawaiians need to control their lives and resources if they are to survive. The statistics for Hawaiian health, social status and education are among the lowest of any group living in Hawai'i." Moreover, "There is a strong moral, legal and historical basis for Hawaiians reassuming self-governance." Blaisdell didn't support what form

sovereignty could be undertaken as, but he said that is up to the kanaka maoli (indigenous Hawaiians) to decide, not the state or federal government. It is believed Blaisdell advocates a conscientious and educational approach to the issue of sovereignty.

Peggy Ha'o Ross, Kuhina Nui (President), of 'Ohana 'O Hawai'i, delivered her group's views at the panel. Founded in 1972, 'Ohana 'O Hawai'i boasts some 30,000 members today. Her group advocates a constitutional monarchy, a "nation-to-nation" model of sovereignty, notes Page. This model supports a sovereign, independent Hawaiian nation.

Ross told the audience, Page writes, "not to blame the state, county or United States but to start taking personal responsibility for their own sovereignty. 'If this is your government, you must stand up for what's right,'" Ross said. Her group moreover believes that Hawai'i's future will serve as a vision of peace to the world. She expressed, "Despite the vast differences spiritually, mentally and physically, we have proven not only to the U. S. but to the nations of the world how we have been able to survive and live in harmony in the spirit of aloha despite of what we, the kanaka maoli indigenous Hawaiians, have had to endure" (Page).

In 1985, the Institute for the Advancement of Hawaiian Affairs (IAHA) was organized in response to the growing awareness of Hawai'i's right to sovereignty and self-determination. The institute, under executive director Hayden Burgess, also advocates the "nation-to-nation" model of sovereignty. They believe the basis of this concept is engraved in the words "self-determination."

Burgess writes in his *Collection of Papers* that *Continued on page 93*



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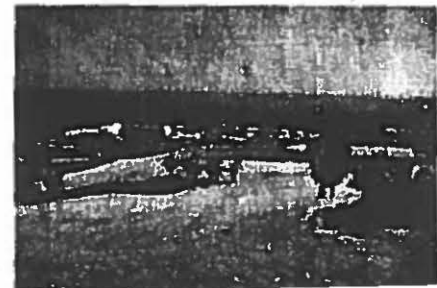
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"Self-determination" is the deciding by the people of a nation what form of government they shall have, without reference to the wishes of any other nation. In making that decision, the people have a range of choices from total assimilation within another nation, territory status, autonomy ("nation-within-a-nation"), statehood, free association, commonwealth, to total independence and sovereignty" (p. 19). It is total independence and sovereignty that the IAHA has chosen to pursue.

International law recognizes self-determination as a basic human right. The United Nations claims that all people have a right to self-determination, thereby free to choose their own political status in order to develop their economic, social and cultural interests. Many native Hawaiians believe that as a result of the illegality of the overthrow in 1893, strongly condemned by U. S. President Grover Cleveland as "wholly without justification" and as an "act of war", the subsequent Republic of Hawaii, annexation to the U. S., and Statehood does not legally bind them to the authority of the United States. Many view the overthrow as a suspension of their right to self-determination.

Burgess states that the IAHA does not pretend to represent all Hawaiian citizens or to be the Hawaiian nation. They are only asserting their "rights and responsibilities as citizens to national self-preservation." I asked him who is or would be included in this Hawaiian nation. He replied that to be a Hawaiian citizen of this nation is not a question of race or blood. They are open to people of all races and background. He further writes, "The question of citizenship and residence within this Hawaiian na-

tion would be settled not by racial extraction but by ones 'relationship' to Hawaii—measured by some standard of acculturation, avowing singular loyalty to Hawaii, ancestry from Hawaiian citizens prior to the American invasion of 1893, etc" (p. 16). In addition, Burgess notes, "If you study Hawaii's history, you can find where citizenship was not restricted to race. We had people of many different races as citizens of Hawaii. The real question was one of national allegiance. One is either a Hawaiian or another national citizen, not both" (p. 32).

Ka Lahui Hawai'i's view of nation and citizenship differs from that of the IAHA. Whereas the IAHA supports total independence and national allegiance, Ka Lahui seeks to remain under the existing U. S. federal policy which affords all native Americans the right to be self-governing, and native Hawaiians (and non-Hawaiians alike) can be citizens of both the U. S. and Ka Lahui. "Honorary" citizenship is offered to non-Hawaiians, but they are restricted from voting and holding office.

Terry Young told me the reason for limiting non-Hawaiian citizenship in Ka Lahui is partly a result of past history. He said when non-Hawaiians were allowed to participate in governmental affairs in the past, native Hawaiians suffered tremendously (i. e., "The Great Mahele of 1848"). He stated, "This time we want to exercise and control our own destiny." Still, non-Hawaiians can and do play a significant role in Ka Lahui. "We want non-Hawaiians to teach and educate other non-Hawaiians about the past," Young expressed.

There are many other areas of concern and questions with respect to Hawaiian sovereignty. There are no easy answers to the disputed land issue, eco-

nomie self-sufficiency, and the military's role in the future. Nevertheless, for too long, native Hawaiians have been given broken promises and a false sense of hope by the U. S. Government. They now realize they have to take matters into their own hands. They also know that their goals cannot be achieved through "violence." Violence is an IRA bomb going off in a London subway station killing 20 people, two Israeli soldiers gunning down a group of Palestinian youths for throwing rocks at them, or an African National Congress rally ending in a blood bath. When is the last time an incident like this has occurred here? Native Hawaiians are a good-natured peaceful people. They do not advocate violence!

Non-Hawaiian citizens and residents, along with native Hawaiians, have some important questions to ask, also. Although the military does provide jobs and helps stimulate the economy, aren't they also the largest contributor to environmental damage in Hawai'i, accounting for more than 60 percent of hazardous wastes? Is the U. S. Military really here to protect us, or are they merely using us as a first line of defense for the U. S. Mainland? One wonders as reports now reveal that top level U. S. Officials knew beforehand about Japan's "sneak attack" in 1941. And doesn't U. S. Military presence today only make us a prime nuclear target in the event of war? Will the people of Hawai'i continue to be misled and deceived?

Education is the key to unlocking these questions and concerns. It may take years or even generations for Hawaiian sovereignty to be "truly" realized. Education of these matters are essential to understanding how sovereignty can exist and benefit all people of Hawai'i.

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