

History 1893 Written in protest against the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani, "Kaulana Nā Pua" veiled its seditious message with its pretty melody and Hawaiian lyrics. **Martha H. Noyes**

We Will Eat Stones



Queen Lili'uokalani yielded her throne temporarily, hoping that the American government would undo the wrong committed against her people. Photo: Hawai'i State Archives.

On Jan. 17 the nation yielded. Queen Lili'uokalani, conceding to the superior armed force of the United States, retired to her home at Washington Place. There she would await response to her appeal to the American government to undo the wrong committed by its representatives, and to restore the Hawaiian nation and return her to her throne.

There was lawlessness on the streets of the city. Hawaiians had been disarmed at once, but Americans fired their rifles in random bursts of celebration. Bullets ricocheted off rocks and tore into walls. The new Provisional Government of Sanford B.

Dole, mindful that it represented but a minority of the populace, concerned itself more with courting America and warding off real and imagined counterrevolutionary conspiracies than with controlling any celebratory civil disorder.

Spies and intrigue abounded. The queen's own life was threatened. Newspapers were strictly controlled, in fact were virtually censored. Attempting to bolster its support and isolate anyone loyal to the queen and the Hawaiian monarchy, the Provisional Government solicited oaths of loyalty from Hawaiians it felt

might have influence or who were engaged in activities related to the new Hawaiian nation.

But most Hawaiians were not loyal to the new government. They were loyal to their homeland, and to their ali'i and their queen. To some of these loyal Hawaiians, official or unofficial offers were made: Sign the oath of loyalty to the new government and you will be paid money.

The Royal Hawaiian Band was thus approached. Band members were appalled at the offer. They were deeply angered. They would not sign, nor would they re-

fuse in simple silence.

Ellen Keho'ohiwaokalani Prendergast was a close friend of the royal family, an intimate of the queen and loyal to the monarchy. She was also a composer of music. On an afternoon in late January 1893, every member save two of the Royal Hawaiian Band arrived at the Prendergast mansion in Kapālama. They told Mrs. Prendergast of the outrage. They told her they would not sign the haoles' paper. They told her they would be satisfied having nothing more than the stones—the pōhaku—the mystic food of the land.

In response, Ellen Prendergast composed a song. Its original title was "He Lei No Ka Po'e Aloha 'Āina," but it

soon became known as "Mele 'Ai Pōhaku" or "The Stone-eating Song," and "Mele Aloha 'Āina" or "The Patriots' Song."

The words of the song are bitter. *Kaulana nā pua a'o Hawai'i/Kūpa'a mahope o ka 'āina/Hiki mai ka 'elele o ka loko 'ino/Palapala 'ānunu me ka pākaha*—"Famous are the children of Hawai'i/ Ever loyal to the land / When the evil-hearted messenger comes / With his greedy document of extortion."

Pane mai Hawai'i moku o Keawe./ Kōkua nā Hono a'o Pī'ilani./ Kāko'o mai Kaua'i o Mano/Pa'apū **CONTINUED ON 22**

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me ke one Kākuhihewa—“Hawai‘i, land of Keawe, answers./Pi‘ilani’s bays help./Mano’s Kaua‘i lends support/And so do the sands of Kākuhihewa.”

‘A‘ole ‘a‘e kau i ka pūlima/Maluna o ka pepa o ka ‘enemi/Ho‘ohul ‘āina kū‘ai hewa/I ka pono sivila a‘o ke kanaka—“No one will fix a signature/To the paper of the enemy/With its sin of annexation/And sale of native civil rights.”

‘A‘ole mākou a‘e minamina/I ka pu‘ukālā a ke aupuni,/Ua lawa mākou i ka pōhaku,/I ka ‘ai kamaha‘o o ka ‘āina—“We do not value/The Government’s sums of money./We are satisfied with the stones./Astonishing food of the land.”

Mahope mākou o Lili‘u-lani/A loa‘a ‘ē ka pono o ka ‘āina./A kau hou ‘ia e ke kalaunu./Ha‘ina ‘ia ma‘ana ka puana/Ka po‘e i aloha i ka ‘āina—“We back Lili‘u-lani/Who has won the rights of the land./She will be crowned again./Tell the story/Of the people who love their land.”

Although the words are bitter, the melody is light, sometimes even light-hearted. The contrast was not without purpose.

Only a handful of the new rulers understood the Hawaiian language. The song could be sung in the faces of the oligarchy, and they would only hear a pleasant Hawaiian melody, ignorant that in fact the very singing of the song was spit cast in their eyes.

Ua lawa mākou i ka pōhaku, I ka ‘ai kamaha‘o o ka ‘āina—“We are satisfied with the stones, the astonishing food of the land.” The phrase is not mere lyric. Pōhaku, stones, are possessed of spirit—mana, mystical and potent. One sense of the lyric, then, is that the mana of the pōhaku is enough to sustain the life of those who refuse the offers of the new government.

In Hawaiian tradition, when Kamehameha I’s people were on the Windward Side of O‘ahu, there was an occasion when food ran short. But no one had to go hungry. Instead, men were dispatched to Kawai Nui in Kailua to gather and bring back the *lepo ‘ae‘ae*, the edible mud of Kawai Nui. Life was sustained from the dirt.

Pōhaku are very much at the heart of Hawaiian life. House foundations, heiau, altars, the lo‘i, all are formed of stone. In that sense, the song could be saying that it is enough that we have the pōhaku, for the pōhaku form the foundation of our life. In Hawaiian cosmolo-

gy the goddess Papa represents Mother Earth, the earth as giver of life. Rock, as earth, in this way is Papa as life-giving rock.

Further, the word pōhaku itself can be taken apart for meanings. Pō means night and darkness, and the realm of the gods. Haku means to put in order, and it also means master and overseer. Haku also means stone. Kū by itself means to stand, to anchor, and it means to transform, and beginning and appearance. So the word pōhaku could mean the anchor to the realm of the gods, or the transformation of the realm of the gods to physical form as stone, or it could mean that the stones stand as overseer of the realm. Or, it could mean all of these things.

The new rulers only heard a pleasant Hawaiian melody, ignorant that in fact the song was spit cast in their eyes.

The song quickly circulated among Hawaiians. Members of the Royal Hawaiian Band performed it until its meaning became more widely known. Then they were forced to stop. But others continued to sing it.

The new government changed the name of the Royal Hawaiian Band to the Hawaiian Band. Years later, when the band was again renamed the Royal Hawaiian Band, a principal attraction was the knowledge that Heleluhe, the singer, would be performing “Mele ‘Ai Pōhaku”—only now, it, too, had been renamed. It was called “Kaulana Nā Pua”—“Famous Are the Flowers”—the name it is known by today.

In the 1960s, Eleanor Prendergast, the composer’s daughter, wrote down the subtext of the song. Noelani Mahoe and the Leo Nahenahe Singers recorded both the song and the subtext on their album *Folksongs of Hawai‘i*. The subtext says:

This is a song of the Hawaiians’ love for their land. The loyal subjects of the Hawaiian kingdom will long be remembered throughout the world for their

firm and courageous defense of their beloved land. At the time of the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom, representatives of the new government attempted to bribe the Hawaiians to renounce their loyalty to Queen Lili'uokalani. Loyal Hawaiians from Hawai'i, Maui and Kaua'i joined with their brothers and sisters on O'ahu in refusing to betray their homeland by selling their glorious heritage for a mess of pottage. All agreed their willingness to subsist by eating stones, the mystic food of the land. They supported the queen in her efforts to perpetuate the life of the land in righteousness. They sincerely prayed that the queen be restored to her rightful throne.

In 1964, not long after recording the song, Noelani Mahoe and Ka'upena Wong performed it at Orvis Auditorium at the University of Hawai'i. Folk singer Pete Seeger was in the audience. He was so struck with the song that he asked the performers to come to the annual folk music festival in Newport, R.I.

Mahoe was hāpai, but it was an honor she couldn't pass up. So in the summer of 1964 Noelani Mahoe and Ka'upena Wong joined renowned folk artists, including Theodore Bikel, Joan Baez, Jose Feliciano and, of course, Pete Seeger, at

the world's most famous folk music festival. There, in Newport, the rest of the world was introduced to "Kaulana Nā Pua," both to its music and its meaning.

Others have recorded the song. Some, like Ike Lee, recorded the subtext along with the song. Some, like the Kahauanu Lake Trio, recorded the song as a lilting melody. Some, like the Hawaiian Nation, recorded it as a song of righteous protest. The Surfers recorded it. So did Vicki I'i, Jack DeMello, Webley Edwards, Marlene Sai, and the Mary Kaye Trio. Hui 'Ohana recorded it, and so did Peter Ahia, Leina'ala Haile, Myrtle K. Hilo, Nina Keali'iwahamana, Peter Moon, Cyrus Green, Willie K., Ozzie Kotani and Keola Beamer. Don Ho recorded it.

The song is widely performed. Palani Vaughan and the King's Own perform it. Moe Keale performs it. The Brothers Cazimero perform it, as do Keith and Carmen Haugen. Carmen dances it.

Some who know the song say it should not be danced to. The words of the song are like the words of a dirge, and a dirge is not to be danced to. Despite the contradicting melody, it is an *oli*, a chant that is not danced.

But it has been danced, and it is still danced. 'Iolani Luahine danced it in

a black holokū. Lani Custino dances it, and so do Healani Youn, Palani Vaughan's Royal Court Dancers, and the Brothers Cazimero's Royal Dance Company.

Wherever it is performed today, whether sung or danced or both, its performance is greeted with recognition and with empathy. The sentiment the lyrics express are not buried, not veiled—not by the pleasant melody, not by the song's title, and not by contemporary circumstances.

Throughout history, a people dispossessed have always found a way in music and in dance to speak aloud their true feelings, while biding time for their dispossession to be remedied. "Kaulana Nā Pua," written 100 years ago, remains to this day a melodic protest against Hawaiians' loss of self-determination, the loss of their sovereign nation. **PAU**

Mahalo to Noelani Mahoe, Poni Kamau'u, John Katmikaua, Hoakalei Kamau'u, Palani Vaughan, Ozzie Kotani, Keith and Carmen Haugen, Marion Kelly, Nina Keali'iwahamana, Moe Keale, Burton White, Jon Osorio, Aaron Mahi, Brenda Dunne and Lorna Prendergast-Dunne for their invaluable assistance in providing information and resources for this article.

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