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Ho'ohui'āina Pala Ka Mai'a: Remembering Annexation One Hundred Years Ago

FROM THE INITIAL SETTLEMENTS along North America's Atlantic Coast, the European pursuit of lands westward was continually marked as an encroachment on the existing cultural and political entities of native nations. The expression of American imperialism continued in 1898 when the United States expanded from its continental stronghold to envelop numerous overseas colonies. The Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico, Sāmoa, Cuba, and, of course, Hawai'i were incorporated into the American realm, a realization of commercial and military designs facilitated by the Spanish-American War.

The taking of these six island states was not welcomed by all affected. Most of the inhabitants of the former Spanish colonies had fought for independence, not for the United States to replace Spain as their colonial master. After Spain capitulated, for example, the Filipino people continued an armed struggle against the latest imperial creation lasting until 1902.¹

Hawai'i was different from the others in that it was not controlled by Spain. The Islands' government was, however, an oligarchic "republic" made up mostly of American transplants who sought annexation to the United States. The Republic of Hawai'i, estab-

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lished with American military support after the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani in 1893, was a complete haole construct lacking support from *kānaka maoli* (Native Hawaiians).² President Sanford Dole and the foreign businessmen who controlled the Republic's government viewed annexation as an opportunity to sell sugar tariff-free to the U.S. market as well as to bolster their tentative hold over a reluctant native populace. *Kānaka maoli* saw annexation as furthering their alienation from political self-determination and their cultural destiny.

Annexation of Hawai'i during the summer of 1898 resulted in a political culture shock to all those involved: *Kānaka maoli*, the haole rulers, immigrant workers, and the newest *malihini* (newcomer) to land in Honolulu—the armed soldiers of the United States. While Hawai'i had been invaded by the United States before, the impact of a permanent influx of thousands of foreign service members brought urgency to the Native saying, "Annexation is Rotten Bananas."³

A HAOLE HOLIDAY

Annexation of the Islands was accomplished in 1898 by the stroke of a pen teamed with the draw of a gun. As the war with Spain pitched patriotism to a heightened political level, arguments were brought forth on the "need" to bring Hawai'i into the American fold. Members of the U.S. Congress, who had dallied with annexation dreams in earlier times, found new reckoning in their quest.

I shall cast my vote in favor of the annexation of the Hawaiian Islands, because we need them as a naval and military necessity now and in the future for the purpose of protecting and defending the territory and the commerce which we already own. We need the islands for national defense. They are the key to the Pacific, and the only coaling station in the Pacific Ocean between the Arctic Ocean and the Equator, between the continent of Asia and the coast of North America. Not to annex them now would be national folly; to annex them, security, peace, and national insurance.⁴

Congressman Francis Newlands of Nevada, while saying on the one hand that he opposed a colonial system for the United States, readily offered a resolution that would annex the Islands for defense pur-

poses.⁵ Debate over the issue ran from mid-May to early July in the American capital. Much of the discussion focused on the constitutionality of a joint House and Senate resolution to enact annexation, which many believed could only occur by way of a treaty. The supporters of imperialism realized a treaty legally required a two-thirds majority vote, which would be far more difficult to obtain than the simple majority called for in the resolution.

Realizing the lack of widespread support for annexation in the United States, the imperialists also feared a treaty would raise the larger issue of support by *kānaka maoli*:

Congress decided that a vote on annexation by the people of Hawai‘i was not required by the U.S. Constitution and would undo the overthrow of the monarchy and, therefore, could not be allowed. The rights of the native people were ignored.⁶

The resolution passed in the House and in the Senate, where the vote tally was far from two-thirds but still a majority. With passage on July 6th, President William McKinley signed off on it the following day, and word of the deed reached Hawai‘i a week later.⁷

The haole politicians and businessmen were elated by the news, but the majority of the Islanders were indifferent or hostile to the idea of becoming an American colony. The Hawaiian Patriotic League sent a condemning message to the U.S. minister to Hawai‘i, Harold Sewall, which read in part:

Therefore, be it resolved: that as the representatives of a large and influential body of native Hawaiians, we solemnly protest against annexation in the manner proposed and without reference to the consent of the people of the Hawaiian Islands.⁸

Hundreds of *kānaka maoli* began showing their opposition to the United States, wearing hat bands created by the Women’s Patriotic League that read: “Ku‘u Hae Aloha” (I Love My Flag).⁹

The ceremonies for the United States to “formally” take possession of Hawai‘i were scheduled to be held at ‘Iolani Palace on the twelfth of August, which was declared an official day off. The “transfer of sovereignty” was recognized by few *kānaka maoli*, and native

leaders such as Queen Lili'uokalani, Princess Ka'iulani, and Prince Kūhiō boycotted the event.¹⁰ U.S. Admiral L. A. Beardslee, who was present at the annexation proclamation, commented:

The band of Hawaiian damsels who were to have lowered for the last time the Hawaiian flag, as the government band played for the last time officially the ponoī, would not lower it. The band refused to play the ponoī, and loud weeping was the only music contributed by the natives.¹¹

The annexation was largely a self-satisfying show put on by and for the foreign American audience. Tellingly, the ceremony was held with almost no *kānaka maoli* attending, while the bulk of the assemblage was the group that the haole oligarchy thought would provide them with support and stability—the U.S. military.

THE CONQUERORS COME

During 1898, the remnants of Spain's empire were being gobbled up by the growing American one. As the war went on, Hawai'i became a useful strategic springboard to defeat Spain in the Western Pacific. Even before annexation, American troopships used Honolulu, with the Republic's blessing, as a way station to take on food and coal. The first convoy of three ships, the *City of Peking*, the *City of Sydney*, and the *Australia*, arrived with nearly 2,500 officers and men on June 1.¹² As a show of good faith by those who desired union with the United States, the haole community offered a reception and a lavish banquet to the "Boys in Blue" on the grounds of the Republic's Executive Building. Free entertainment was also provided for the soldiers at the Waikiki boat house, the Kamehameha School, and the Bishop Museum.¹³

Hawai'i was transformed into a military training ground with sailship after steamship bringing men on their course to occupy the Philippines: the *Senator*, the *Morgan City*, the *Ohio*, the *Indiana*, the *Valencia*, the *Zealandia*, the *City of Para*, the *City of Newport*, the *Colon*, the *Monterey*, the *Monadnock*, the *Nero*, the *Brutus*, the *Puebla*, the *Peru*. Drilling and exercises took place out at the Makiki League Baseball field, while the noise of target practice filled the Honolulu air. Maneuvers were held in the O'ahu countryside as well as during an excursion by troops to the Big Island.



FIG. 1. Brigadier General Charles King, who took command of the newly created Military District of Hawai'i in August 1898, as he appeared in an engraving published in the newspaper *Ka Nupepa Kū'oko'a*, September 9, 1898.

Before the United States finally foreclosed on the Republic's mortgage and took the deed to lands that had no clear title, plans for a permanent garrison had already been laid. As early as July 21, the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* reported President McKinley's proposal to send the 1st Regiment of New York Volunteers to Hawai'i.¹⁴ The commander of the 1st New York, Colonel Thomas Barber, arrived in early August and inspected sites for the imminent arrival of his troops. Barber was a West Point graduate who had served in the regular army for eighteen years, and there was talk of his promotion to brigadier general as independent commander for the Islands.

Following Barber, four days after "Flag Raising Day," the men of the 1st New York disembarked from the schooner *Charles Nelson*. With members of the 2nd Regiment of U.S. Volunteer Engineers, the New York Regiment set up a temporary camp on the grounds of Kapi'olani Park. The next evening, the USS *Lamke* arrived, bringing more Americans to the mix.

Adding to the late-August congestion was the deployment of men off the *Arizona* and the *Tacoma*, which had stopped in Hawai'i on their way westward. Before setting sail from Honolulu, these troops received orders to remain on O'ahu. On board the *Arizona*, probably to Colonel Barber's disappointment, was Brigadier General Charles King, who soon took command of the newly created "Military District of Hawaii." By August 22, the outpost of several thousand had the obsequious patronym of "Camp McKinley."¹⁵

THE DEATH CAMP

The site for the new garrison was described "as a dry location and rather dusty."¹⁶ Little fresh water was available at the camp, and so the engineers worked on laying a pipe to tap into Honolulu's mains. The soldiers slept in small tents as General King, Colonel Barber, and officers of the engineer regiment continued to search for more suitable land for the haole troops.

In the first few days, the foreign forces, not accustomed to island life, shared their cramped space with some unexpected tent-guests:

Two nights ago an engineer at Camp McKinley discovered that a centipede was in his night shirt and stampeded for guard quarters. He was

bitten on the back and left arm. The centipede, which was described as being about four times as large as in real life, escaped.¹⁷

But insects were just the beginning of problems for the soldiers. Diseases such as measles and typhoid flourished in the conditions of the crowded camp. Measles were introduced by the crew of the *Australia* and spread not only through the American ranks but to the native populace as well.¹⁸ Deaths by typhoid tripled in Hawai'i from 1897 to 1898 because of the influx of foreigners. One soldier, delirious with the typhus germ, committed suicide by drinking a poisonous amount of carbolic acid.¹⁹ The military established a hospital at Independence Park near Mānoa Valley to quarantine the afflicted servicemen, but mortalities began to mount, and at one point almost a fifth of the garrison was on the regimental sick list.²⁰

Newspaper editorials began questioning the circumstances:

It is very sad to watch the daily announcements of a death among the young soldiers of the garrison. Somebody must certainly be to blame for the sanitary conditions which swell the death rate in a manner foreign to Honolulu. . . . A thorough investigation should be made into this wholesale slaughter by typhoid fever in a country, where that disease has heretofore been nearly unknown.²¹

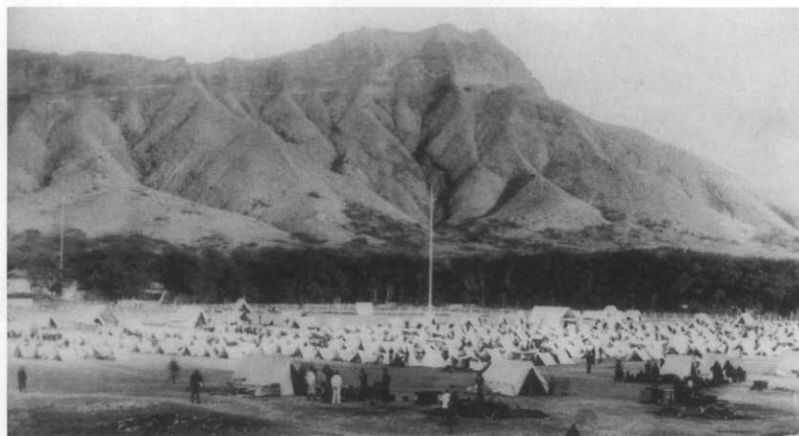


FIG. 2. The 1st New York Volunteer Regiment at Camp McKinley, Kapi'olani Park, in 1898. (Hawai'i State Archives)

Another siren broadcast:

Should an epidemic of typhoid fever ravage Honolulu the Board of Health will have to shoulder the blame. But, can the President of the Board of Health, with all his imagined powers, restore life to those who may fall victim to an epidemic?²²

The Board's president, William O. Smith, took some heed to the words of the community. Smith, the Republic's attorney general and a leader in the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani, could not resurrect the dead, but he did attempt to rectify the sanitary situation at the camp, especially in the wake of a public outcry. Upon visiting the military outpost, Smith found numerous privy vaults that were, in his



FIG. 3. U.S. troops digging in. (Photo by Hester Harland from the Kate and John Kelly Art Foundation)

words, "in a very offensive and foul-smelling condition, without proper disinfection and surrounded by vast numbers of flies."²³ Another large cesspool was overflowing into a drain carrying fresh water from the nearby rice fields and fishponds.

When meeting Colonel Barber, the Board president advised him of better methods to rectify the pollutive spectacle. The Hawaiian newspaper *Kū'oko'a* reported that, after a short conversation, Barber barked back; "Aole au e ae ia oe e Mr. Smith, e hele mai oe i keia kahua hoomana e hoolilo mai ai iau i hupo makawela" (I will not allow you, Mr. Smith, to come to this camp to treat me like a God d—fool.)²⁴ The colonel continued taunting Smith and threatened, "if we were not in the camp I would knock you down!"²⁵ The Board of Health president returned to his offices and prepared a report that ordered Barber to clean up Camp McKinley before it was condemned. The colonel replied by complaining the newspapers had made "a great pow-wow . . . over the affairs of the garrison, and suggested the government control the utterances of the press."²⁶

HONOLULU THE JAY TOWN

By early September, relations between the civilian populace and the military were faltering along an already bumpy path. While many of the "Boys in Blue" were deathly ill, their healthy comrades were creating their fair share of disturbances for the new "American town." On September 4, more than one hundred soldiers invaded Mānoa Valley, ransacking private gardens for their pineapples, watermelons, and other edibles.²⁷ Most of the landholders, Chinese farmers, were "heartbroken to see in a few minutes the work of months ruined before their eyes by the strangers wearing the uniform of the Stars and Stripes."²⁸

Within a short period, the soldiers were introducing themselves to the locals in other diverse manners: being drunk and fistfighting with each other in public, stabbing a Chinese law clerk, hijacking the carriage of J. H. Fisher, the commander of the Islands' National Guard, assaulting a Japanese coach driver and several Native policemen on numerous occasions, and invading the Waikiki home of Judge W. Luther Wilcox, district magistrate of Honolulu.²⁹

On the night of October 3, Lieutenant Wheelock, the officer in charge of keeping the enlisted men on liberty peaceful, himself got drunk and declared martial law from the corner of Hotel and Fort Streets.³⁰ Wheelock and another lieutenant, the son of General King's superior, Major General Merriam, ordered the Army guard to clear the streets of all denizens. The two drunk officers directed horse-mounted troops to chase Honolulu locals off the sidewalk, thereby injuring a merchant sailor, and pointed pistols in the face of astounded citizens, ordering them to return to their homes.³¹ Awakened by the early-morning disturbance, General King arose from his bed and dispatched his aide to reel in the lawless officers without further troubles.

Sending a report to General Merriam, King disavowed any wrongdoing by his superior's son, the lieutenant. The community, tiring of its new "guests," began voicing disapproval of the military. The *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*

howled for court martials, for immediate action on the part of the civil authorities, for a censure of General King, impeachment of General Merriam, dismissal of Marshall Brown, and other similar measures.³²

When more soldiers were arrested following the October 3 incident, Judge Wilcox summed up his views on the situation at their trial:

If there was any prospect of your paying a just penalty before a military court I would let you off easy here. But, to tell you the truth, I have no confidence whatever in your courts martial. A short time ago two army officers created a most disgraceful disturbance at night in the business center. Next day, when complaints were to be made, your commanding officer was sick abed and could not be seen, but gave a big dinner to friends that evening all the same. The two officers were white-washed.³³

General King, feeling affronted, demanded that a "public retraction" be made by the judge and wrote asking for an apology.³⁴ Wilcox sent off a letter saying no such retraction would be offered, whereupon King hastily returned:

I deeply regret that, at this stage of our national relations, an official of the Hawaiian Government should assume that from an official covert he has the right to issue false and defamatory utterances concerning the Commanding General of the U.S. forces here stationed, but your reply to a courteous letter removes at once the matter from a personal to an official issue and yourself from the further consideration of Charles King Brigadier General U.S.V., Commanding.³⁵

The *Independent*, a newspaper generally not supportive of the local haole rulers, offered its own public analysis: "Brigadier-General King evidently does not understand the situation here. He seems not to realize that Hawaii and its Government will go on exactly as heretofore, whether there is one or one hundred generals lying around."³⁶

STRIKING THE TENTS

With the Spanish war over and ill-fated conditions continuing at the outpost, the volunteers in Hawai'i let their feelings of restlessness be known. Two companies of the regiment "entered vigorous protests"

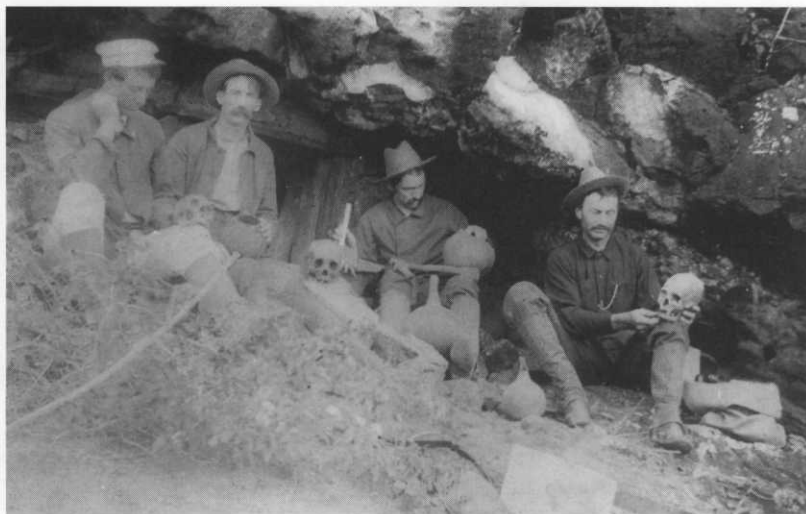


FIG. 4. Soldiers of the 1st New York Volunteer Regiment on an excursion at an unknown location. (Photo by F. J. H. Rickon from the Hawai'i State Archives)

over the food supply, and it was reported that "most of the New Yorkers at Camp McKinley are anxious to be ordered home."³⁷ The first to leave Hawai'i was General King himself, not for home but to the Philippines, per order of General Merriam. When King reboarded the *Arizona* in late October and departed, the "Military District of Hawaii" was abolished and so also was Colonel Barber's anticipated promotion.³⁸

On November 13, word came that the New York volunteers were to leave within a few weeks and be mustered out for Christmas.³⁹ When Sanford Dole's wife called for Honolulu citizens to put on a Thanksgiving feast for the troops before their departure, the newsmen shot back:

We have been smothered, abused, conquered and finally annexed, and yet the Hawaiians are asked to put up money, turkeys, chickens, ducks, etc. etc. for the benefit of the men who, to us at least, represent only a people that took away our country, our independence and our flag.⁴⁰

When Colonel Barber and the first five hundred of the New Yorkers shipped out on November 29, more than two thousand people saw them off.⁴¹ The former camp at Kapi'olani Park was left to its previous purpose, but the park's trustees found the bandstand utterly destroyed and the track in rough shape. Numerous neighboring land owners complained to the civil authorities that the military had destroyed fences, cut down trees, and dumped refuse everywhere.

At Wai'ala'e, where some troops had been welcomed on Paul Isenberg's land, the campsite was also left in a sad state. Isenberg asked the soldiers to burn their clothing and bedding to prevent further transmission of the typhus germ. The Americans instead donated their items to unknowing *kānaka maoli* living nearby. When he confronted the remaining soldiers,

vile verbal obscenities were the answer to Mr. Isenberg, and the impression is that the outrageous conduct of the men was for the purpose, as one of them said, of giving Honolulu a chance for such a typhoid fever epidemic which made such ravages in the ranks of the soldiers.⁴²

As the *Scandia* sailed on December 10 with the final departing force aboard, Honolulu soon settled down to its accustomed level of

activity and noise.⁴³ The last company of New Yorkers vacated the Islands, leaving behind those members in the military hospital too sick to travel, one officer in command, and the chaplain. With only a remnant of the engineer battalions remaining, the dream of a large permanent garrison on O‘ahu would have to wait several months for the arrival of the regular army forces.

The euphoric welcome Hawai‘i’s haole leadership had given the U.S. troops in mid-1898 had given way to mixed feelings by the end of the year. The military, in many respects, treated Hawai‘i as what it really was—an invaded colony. While Native Hawaiians had understood this relationship immediately, having seen the military’s motives help overthrow their queen in 1893, the local haole were slower to realize the loss of status annexation had brought.

After 1898, the priorities of the armed forces would always compete not only with the interests of *kānaka maoli* but also with those of their supposed beneficiaries, the haole “sugar kings.” The number of court cases against the United States in those early years involving influential haole corporations such as the O‘ahu Railway and Land Company, the Bishop Estate, the O‘ahu Sugar Company, and the Honolulu Sugar Company illustrate some of the disillusionment over annexation.⁴⁴ The *Independent*, never missing an opportunity to remind the community of its exploded notions, commented, “It seems passing strange that the Colonels and Generals should treat Hawaii as a conquered territory; but ‘boys,’ you wanted annexation, and you have got it with a vengeance.”⁴⁵

NOTES

¹ Richard Drinnon, *Facing West, the Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire-Building* (New York: Schocken Books, 1980) 307.

² Noel Kent, *Hawaii, Islands Under the Influence* (New York: Monthly Review P, 1983) 64.

³ S. Pinao, with translation by Lilikalā Kame‘eleihiwa, “Excerpts from Buke Mele Lāhui, 1895,” *Hawai‘i Review* 36 (1993): 14.

⁴ William Sulzer, *Speeches on Hawaii, 2nd Session, 55th Congress* (Washington, 1898) 15.

⁵ William Russ, Jr., *The Hawaiian Republic (1894–98) and its Struggle to Win Annexation* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna UP, 1992) 303.

⁶ Mililani Trask, *Ka Ho‘okolokolonui Kānaka Maoli, The Peoples’ International Tribunal Hawai‘i Mana‘o* (Honolulu, 1993) 11.

- 7 Russ, *The Hawaiian Republic* 353, 357.
- 8 Russ, *The Hawaiian Republic* 364-65.
- 9 PCA Aug. 16, 1898.
- 10 Russ, *The Hawaiian Republic* 365-66.
- 11 L. A. Beardslee, "Pilikias," *The North American Review* 167 (1898): 475.
- 12 PCA June 2, 1898.
- 13 PCA June 2, June 3, 1898.
- 14 PCA July 21, 1898.
- 15 PCA Aug. 22, 1898.
- 16 PCA Aug. 22, 1898.
- 17 PCA Aug. 22, 1898.
- 18 PCA July 2, 1898.
- 19 PCA Dec. 1, 1898.
- 20 *Hawaiian Star* Nov. 1, 1898.
- 21 *Independent* Nov. 15, 1898.
- 22 *Independent* Oct. 27, 1898.
- 23 *Independent* Oct. 28, 1898.
- 24 *Ka Nupepa Kū'oko'a* Nov. 4, 1898.
- 25 *Independent* Oct. 28, 1898.
- 26 *Daily Bulletin* Oct. 27, 1898.
- 27 PCA Sept. 5, 1898.
- 28 PCA Sept. 5, 1898.
- 29 *Star* Oct. 6, Oct. 8, 1898; *Independent* Oct. 5, Oct. 6, Oct. 18, Oct. 19, 1898, Nov. 5, 1898.
- 30 *Independent* Oct. 4, 1898.
- 31 *Star* Oct. 4, 1898.
- 32 *Independent* Oct. 19, 1898.
- 33 *Star* Oct. 19, 1898.
- 34 *Star* Oct. 20, 1898.
- 35 *Independent* Oct. 21, 1898.
- 36 *Independent* Oct. 20, 1898.
- 37 PCA Sept. 3, 1898.
- 38 PCA Oct. 14, 1898.
- 39 *Star* Nov. 13, 1898.
- 40 *Independent* Nov. 23, 1898.
- 41 PCA Nov. 30, 1898.
- 42 *Independent* Dec. 8, 1898.
- 43 PCA Dec. 10, 1898.
- 44 For example, see 1 US Dist Ct Haw 140 and 257
- 45 *Independent* Oct. 27, 1898.