

*The Dread Taboo, Human Sacrifice, and
Pearl Harbor*

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The word taboo, or tabu, is well known to everyone, but it is especially interesting that it is one of but two or possibly three words from the Polynesian language to have been adopted by the English-speaking world. While the original meaning of the taboo was "Sacred" or "Set apart," usage has given it a decidedly secular meaning, and it has become a part of everyday speech all over the world. In the Hawaiian language the word is "kapu," and in Honolulu we often see a sign on a newly planted lawn or in a park that reads, not, "Keep off the Grass," but, "Kapu." And to understand the history and character of the Hawaiian people, and be able to interpret many things in our modern life in these islands, one must have some knowledge of the story of the taboo in Hawaii.

ANTOINETTE WITHINGTON, "The Dread Taboo," in *Hawaiian Tapestry*

Captain Cook's arrival in the Hawaiian Islands signaled more than just the arrival of western geographical and scientific order; it was the arrival of British social and political order, of British *law and order* as well. From Cook onward, westerners coming to the islands used their own social-civil codes as a basis to judge, interpret, describe, and almost uniformly condemn Hawaiian social and civil codes. With this condemnation, westerners justified the imposition of their own order on the Hawaiians, leading to a justification of colonialism and the loss of land and power for the indigenous peoples. That is, a fundamental premise for the colonization

of the islands is based on western interpretations, and representations, of law and order in Hawaiian society.

All societies have their laws, their ways of making laws, and their ways of dealing with law-breakers. These may be religious laws, issued by deities and transmitted to the populace through priests, holy men, sacred scriptures, or cultural iconographies. Or they may be “secular” laws, created by all or part of the people, disseminated by word of mouth or written text. These laws too maintain a degree of sanctity. Durkheim suggested that even in modern society, based on secular rationalism, the moral base of society retains a transcendental quality. Though morals can be understood *intellectually* as products of social convention and convenience, these morals nonetheless continue to impress the individual *emotionally* as somehow elevated, supernatural, on a higher plane of existence. The moral base of modern society remains a “sacred law” that inspires deep respect, awe, love, and even dread, invoking patterns of absolute, unthinking faith (Garland 1990, 55).

In either a religious or secular moral order, laws themselves are sustained by threat of punishment—loss of property, loss of social standing, even loss of life. To remind the populace of the social order embodied in the law, symbolic landscapes may be created, demarcating sacred spaces representing the link between social life and the society’s highest ideals—ascribing a “holiness” to those principles. When such symbolic landscapes are created by the state, they also remind the populace of the power of the law and the position of the ruling body, including its potential to exercise punishment in the name of the law. The position of the ruling power is therefore rendered sacred as well.

The two fundamental concepts in understanding the sacredness of the pre-haole, Hawaiian social order and the laws that upheld it, are embedded in the linked concepts of *ali'i* and *kapu*. These are both problematic points in western literature, wherein their negative significations are inextricable from their representations. *Ali'i* refers to what has been called in English the “chiefly” class of people in the islands—as differentiated from the *kāhuna* (priests), *maka'āinana* (commoners), and *kauwā* (outcasts, slaves). The distinguishing characteristic of the *ali'i* is their sacredness: through genealogies, *ali'i* can trace their descent back to the gods. Their degree of godliness (*mana*) is therefore hereditary and can be carefully preserved through intermarriage with similar or higher-ranking *ali'i*.

Genealogies were memorized and chanted on public occasions to reassert this divine linkage.

Because they were seen as divine beings, the higher-ranking *ali'i* were set apart by laws protecting their persons and properties. These laws were also intended to protect the commoners from accidentally violating the sacred person or property of the *ali'i*, such violations often being punishable by death. Thus a complex system of fairly well-defined laws and punishments, known as the “*kapu* system,” set the ruling class apart. The *ali'i* also had the power to proclaim *kapu*¹—to declare actions, space, or resources sacred, hence “prohibited.” Space could be so demarcated by placing “*kapu* sticks”—poles topped with white *kapu*-covered balls—on the property. Other chiefly *kapu* were announced by heralds sent out for that purpose.

Hawaiian historian Kamakau stated “There were two kinds of *kanawai* [laws] observed by the Hawaiian people from the very ancient days: the *kanawai akua*, or gods’ laws; and the *kanawai kapu ali'i*, or sacred chiefly laws” (1964, 11). Violation of the chiefly *kapu* could be punished by death; violation of the gods’ laws by human sacrifice.² As divine beings positioned between the populace and the deities themselves, high-ranking *ali'i* were responsible for the creation and sanctification of *heiau*—large temple complexes dedicated to specific deities (of agriculture, war, and so on) where the major rituals of society took place. On certain of these *heiau* (known as *luakini* or *po'o kanaka*) human sacrifices were offered to the gods. These *heiau* were symbolic landscapes representing the combined religious, social, and legal order of society. On the one hand, they were the site of socially sanctioned violence: those offered in sacrifice were said to have been *kapu*-breakers. And on the other hand, they were the burial places for bones of the *ali'i*, reifying their position as sacred persons. *Heiau* were therefore sacred space in a social as well as religious sense.

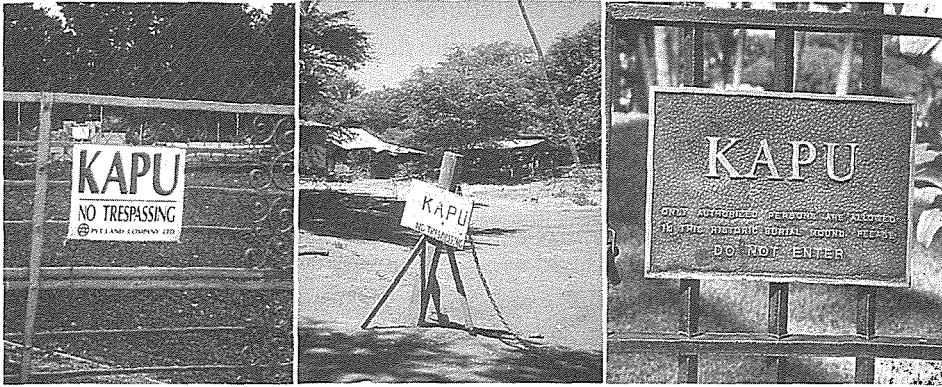
The ease with which one might infract upon a *kapu*—knowingly or unknowingly, as when one’s shadow fell on a chief—and the punishment of these infractions with death (unless spared by chiefly edict) was the basis for Withington’s title, “The Dread Taboo,” and a broader western discourse about the oppressiveness of the traditional socio-legal religious system. The extent to which this system was “oppressive” within Hawaiian society is questionable on examination of the Hawaiian literature. Malo, for example, who stated that “Every thing went according to

the will or whim of the king,” also outlined the checks and balances between a ruling chief and his people (1951). Nonetheless, the interaction between Hawaiians and westerners (haoles) created new circumstances, new economies in which the power and imposition of *kapu* by the *ali'i* were interpreted into a western discourse on the Dread Taboo. But as Withington pointed out, “*kapu*” becomes part of the western vocabulary, and—I will argue—part of western practice in the islands, mirroring its conceptualization in the western literature, if not its practice in Hawaiian society.

A look at Hawaiian dictionaries yields a sense of the signification of *kapu*. These texts suggest an ambivalence between the sacred and secular sense of the term. While Andrews' 1922 dictionary explains *kapu* as signifying the former religious system in the islands, Judd's 1940 dictionary defines the term simply as “to be prohibited.” Judd's 1943 dictionary, in collaboration with Pukui and Stokes, presents “forbidden” and “sacred”—in that order—the reassertion of the sacred perhaps suggesting Pukui's influence. The Pukui-Elbert 1965 dictionary goes further: “*Kapu*. 1. Taboo, prohibition; special privilege or exemption from ordinary taboo; sacredness; prohibited, forbidden; sacred, holy, consecrated.” This definition presents the much wider range of uses for the word and indicates the position of those who control it. They enjoy special privilege or exemption from ordinary taboo: ability to act above the ordinary law, and ability to prohibit others from certain actions, resources, or spaces.

In the 1986 revised and enlarged edition of Pukui and Elbert's dictionary, the phrases “no trespassing, keep out” are added to the above definition. This is now the most common usage of the word in the islands, from signs on fences surrounding government property to those hanging in suburban driveways where pit-bulls growl behind chain-link fences. I will argue, however, that in all cases, sacredness remains—not the same sacredness inherent in the original use of the word, but a new “civil” sacredness based on American ideals of private property.

While the word *kapu* remains, the social, moral, and political base of society in the islands has changed dramatically from its Hawaiian origins to a Christian, American code. Western-Christian ideas of morality, civil rights, and, more important, private property are the new sacred principles around which laws are constructed and punishments defined. Capitalism is the new ideology on which society and law are ordered. Yet as power changed hands from the Hawaiian priests and *ali'i* to Christian



FIGURES 1–3. *Kapu* signs on the Hawaiian landscape: (1) near the Nānākuli landfill, leeward O‘ahu (photo by Mehmed Ali); (2) in the driveway of a private residence on Lāna‘i; (3) at the entrance to the former tomb of Kamehameha the Second near ‘Iolani Palace, Honolulu. (Photos 2 and 3 by R D K Herman)

priests and haole governments, the structure of power remained astonishingly intact. A distinctive parallel between the new form of power-holding, and that ascribed to the old form, remains.

The new discourses about the sacred served to justify and naturalize this change. By representing the old sacred code as evil, immoral, and oppressive, the new order positioned itself as proper, just, and democratic—tacitly “given” as the right and natural order. The term *kapu*—designating “prohibition,” “sacredness,” and now “private property”—became a multivalent signifier across the lines of Hawaiian and haole discourse and ideology. The continuous use of the term *kapu* therefore marks the path of inquiry into the relationship between sacredness and social control in the islands.

To assist in tracking these shifting relations, six basic principles are presented:

- Kapu* as law: control of space, resources, labor, behavior;
- Authority to impose these laws characterizes the *ali‘i*;
- Kapu* as privilege or exception to the law, for the “*ali‘i*”;
- These laws as *sacred*—constituting or reflecting religious values;
- Punishment of *kapu*-breakers, especially the death penalty;
- Human sacrifice and sacred spaces as upholding or reifying this system of values.

Three pivotal events mark the course of investigation. These events also literally put Hawai'i on the map: the death of Captain Cook in 1778, the overthrow of the *kapu* system in 1820 with the subsequent introduction of Christianity, and the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941. In a strange circular movement from Kealakekua Bay to Pearl Harbor, each of these three events reflects junctures of Hawaiian *kapu*, sacred space, and human sacrifice with their mirror-image haole institutions.

CAPTAIN COOK REVISITED

At the time Cook arrived in the islands, private property was becoming a crucial basis for social and political organization in mercantilist Europe. This important social value led immediately to conflict between the British explorers and the Islanders. Shortly after Cook first touched at Kaua'i on his third voyage, he remarked, "At first, on their entering the ship, they endeavored to steal everything they came near; or rather to take it openly, as what we either should not resent, or not hinder. We soon convinced them of their mistake; and if they, after some time, became less active in appropriating to themselves whatever they took a fancy to, it was because they found that we kept a watchful eye over them" (Cook and King 1784, 2:195).

It is quite apparent from Cook's report that the Islanders' ideas of property were very different from those of the British. They were not stealing in a deceitful way, but "taking openly."³ What is significant is the means, not initially elucidated by Cook, used to impress upon these people the British notion of property. These means became more clear with time. Cook's journal stated that when a Mr Williamson tried to land on shore to scout for water, the natives "attempted to take away the oars, muskets, and, in short, every thing that they could lay hold of; and pressed so thick upon him that he was obliged to fire, by which one man was killed. . . . It did not appear to Mr. Williamson, that the natives had any design to kill, or even to hurt, any of his party; but they seemed excited by mere curiosity, to get from them what they had, being, at the same time, ready to give, in return, any thing of their own" (Cook and King 1784, 2:197). Unbeknown to the Hawaiians, for whom this incident had its own culturally encoded meaning, this was for the British the beginning of the assertion of new laws of property, sacred enough to be punishable by death. Not surprisingly, the result of such punishment had

the desired effect: Cook remarked that as for their “thievery,” “they soon laid aside a conduct which, we convinced them, they could not persevere in with impunity” (1784, 2:205). The imposition of this new law, backed with the power to enforce it with violence, began to establish British order in the islands.

In the official version of Cook’s (and King’s) journals, the language of necessity was used to justify the violence. They were “obliged” to perform these acts; it was “found necessary” to flog, shoot, burn, to demonstrate to the Hawaiians their “mistakes.” The demonstration of British might became, in these instances, an end in itself. When Hawaiians carried off a boat’s rudder, Cook had muskets and four-pounders fired over their canoe, as he “thought this a good time to shew these people the use of fire-arms” (Cook and King 1784, 3:548). On the fateful return to Kealakekua Bay, when the Hawaiians were pulling nails out of the ships’ sheathing, the British first fired at them, but as the Hawaiians evaded their guns by diving under the ship, “It was found necessary to make an example, by flogging one of them on board the *Discovery*” (1784, 3:21). The invocation of “necessity” justified and naturalized these acts within the “common sense” of British law and order, thereby imposing that order on the Islanders. In so doing, the British were establishing a new *kapu*, thereby positioning themselves as *ali’i*.

This discourse on property posing the western naval powers against the Islanders, began for Hawai’i with Cook but reached its clearest expression with instructions for the United States Exploring Expedition: “Among savage nations, unacquainted with, or possessing but vague ideas of the rights of property, the most common cause of collision with civilized visitors, is the offense and the punishment of theft” (Wilkes 1845, 1:xxviii).

As well as taking precautions against theft, Wilkes was instructed to “use all due moderation and forbearance” in punishing the offender, “nor commit any act of hostility, unless in self-defense, or to protect or secure the property” of those under his command, “until it shall become apparent that they can only be restrained from violence by fear or force.” The expectation of trouble and the need for violence to protect property were enunciated (Wilkes 1845, 1:xxviii–xxix).

With superior firepower, it was inevitable that in a contest of power, the western forces would dominate the Hawaiians. Such a conflict occurred over the last case of theft Cook ever encountered. Despite his

warm welcome on his first visit to Kealakekua Bay, Cook's return after breaking a mast in a storm was "untimely." The Hawaiians were not so pleased to see him and his men, and were described by the British as "tumultuous" and "insolent." On some occasions they seemed to be arming themselves with stones. Captain King quoted Cook as saying, "I am afraid that these people will oblige me to use some violent measures; for they must not be left to imagine, that they have gained an advantage over us" (Cook and King 1784, 3:40). Intending to reassert and maintain a position of political superiority, Cook instructed his marines to load their guns with ball—not shot—and "in the case of [the Hawaiians'] beginning to throw stones, or behave insolently, immediately to fire a ball at the offenders." Framed within the discourse of "order," "necessity," and "unfortunate" incidents is the oft-forgotten "other side" of the story of Cook's death: that he had already passed a blanket death sentence on Hawaiians who violated the British order.

When a cutter was taken from one of the ships, Cook ordered that no canoes be allowed to leave the bay. Any canoe attempting to leave would be seized and destroyed if the cutter could not be recovered "by peaceable means." As a result, Cook's men fired on some canoes and "unfortunately" killed a chief "of the first rank."

Unfortunate for Cook, that is, because this news reached the village where he was attempting to take the high chief hostage to retrieve the cutter. The news enraged the Hawaiians and they advanced angrily toward Cook and his party. Cook fired at his assailant, first with shot (to no effect) and then with ball, and in so doing, "killed one of the foremost of the natives." British: two, Hawaiians: nil. Cook was yet unharmed.

A scuffle ensued in which Cook and four marines were killed. The survivors beat a hasty retreat to the ships, where they were later told by an emissary from the priests that seventeen Hawaiians, five of them chiefs, had died at the village, while eight more—three of them chiefs—had been killed across the bay where Captain King was working on the new mast. Counting the chief killed earlier, that made twenty-five Hawaiians dead to five British. But the violence was not yet over; British supremacy had yet to be completely established.

The first bombardment of a Hawaiian island by a foreign power then occurred, after an "insolent native" waving Cook's hat in a canoe incited the British to fire cannon on the people ashore. Several Hawaiians were killed or wounded. When a British landing party went ashore and was

“molested” by “stone-throwing natives,” Captain King remarked that “it was now found necessary to burn down some straggling houses.” “Unfortunately”—that word again—the seamen burned down the entire village and shot several persons escaping from the flames, cutting off two of their heads and taking them aboard ship. After these final British acts of violence—to person and property—the Hawaiians returned the pieces of Cook’s body.

SACRED SPACE AND HUMAN SACRIFICE

The “apotheosis” of Cook by both British and Hawaiians has been discussed at length elsewhere (Denig 1984; Sahlins 1981, 1985; Obeyesekere 1992). As a sacred person, Cook presents a confluence between Hawaiian and western discourses. For the Hawaiians at the time, Cook was clearly understood as an *ali’i*—a sacred person. Offerings were made to him, and he was taken into the *heiau*. The space where he set up his observatory (on a *heiau* platform) was made *kapu* by the priests for his protection. Without engaging the arguments surrounding the British apotheosis of Cook, I shall consider his death in regard to sacred space and human sacrifice.

With Cook’s death, Hawai’i—and Kealakekua Bay in particular—became sacred ground for the British as a whole and for all European navigators. Cook died for the sacred principles of capitalism, embodied in navigation-for-commerce, the opening-up of the world to western shipping and trade. The spot where he died became a pilgrimage site for later navigators, travelers, and tourists. Most explorers after Cook made a journey to the site—many of them noting the scars of British cannon fire still visible on the landscape.

For more than one hundred years after the event, phrases identifying Hawai’i as the site of Cook’s death were frequently included on world and regional maps. Fitzpatrick’s (1986) study of the early mapping of Hawai’i showed that, starting with Samuel Dunn’s 1781 world map, cartographers went to great trouble to incorporate Cook’s death onto maps, while tragic events elsewhere in the Pacific went almost entirely unremarked. That Hawai’i should have found such a prominent place in western geography stands in bold contrast to Pacific Islands as a whole, which receive little or no attention even in contemporary geography. Cook added directly to the geography of the islands: a town near Kealakekua

Bay is named “Captain Cook,” and the latest of several monuments to his death there continues to be pointed out on tourist maps and guidebooks.

Lord Byron’s visit to Kealakekua Bay in 1825—after the official end of the *kapu* system—was punctuated by two events that symbolically desacralized Hawaiian sacred space and consecrated British sacred space. The entire story as related by Dampier is framed within a discussion of Captain Cook. The first event was the looting of a *heiau* Dampier identified as “the only building of the sort which has not been ransacked & despoiled. Indeed, so sacred has this Morai [*heiau*] been held in the estimation of the natives, that no white man before our arrival had even by his presence profaned its threshold.” I present Dampier’s account at some length.

An old Priest, the Guardian of these relics, still looked upon each of these grim looking Deities with the utmost veneration; when therefore it was made known to him that Lord Byron had procured [a Hawaiian chief’s] consent to possess himself with the persons of as many Gods as he desired, the old man’s indignation at this sacrilegious rape became very apparent. He was obliged, however, to submit. I had begun to sketch the inside of the Morai, having already finish’d one of its exterior appearance, when the rapacious inclinations of our party, suddenly began to manifest themselves. I threw aside my pencil, & regardless of the divine punishment attending such shameless sacrilege, took ample share in the depopulation of this ancient sanctuary.

Two frowning Gods, about twelve feet high, stood exactly opposite the door: at the feet of these the natives were accustomed to lay their offerings; these were quickly plucked up by the roots, & sent down as prizes to our boats.

I succeeded in appropriating to myself, a beautiful spear . . . a couple of Gods, & a few other curious articles within my reach, & as all the other visitants were equally piously inclined, nothing worth having remained, with the exception of the range of feathered Idols, to which were attached the royal bones. These, the old Priest determined to rescue from the general devastation, & resolutely refused to allow such sacred relics, to pass his threshold. Having thus gratified our curiosity, we returned on board, laden with the spoils of our heathen temple. (Dampier 1971, 67)

The plunder of the first *heiau* rendered profane that which was sacred to the Hawaiians. Icons of the deities became curiosities, property of the British, with exchange rather than sacred value.

About two days later, Byron had a sheet of copper engraved:

Sacred To The Memory Of Capt. Jas. Cook, R.R. (Who Discover'd These Islands In The Year Of Our Lord 1778, This Humble Monument Is Erected By His Countrymen In The Year Of Our Lord 1825.)

The copper was fixed onto a block of wood, which was then made into a cross ten feet high. This cross was placed in the center of a ruined *heiau* where, they were told, Cook's body had been carved up. This particular combination of iconographies symbolizes three things the British hold sacred. The first, again, is navigation-for-commerce: this large cross set in the landscape was intended to serve as a beacon to guide western ships into Kealakekua Bay, where they could replenish their supplies. Cook's death thus served to mark the way for continued British presence in the islands. Second is the cross, the icon of Christianity, the values of which allegedly underlie western social order. Placing a cross on a *heiau* is a symbolic gesture of Christianity overcoming the *kapu* system. Third, the placement of the plaque on a cross symbolizes the sacredness of Cook himself by symbolically linking his death to the form of human sacrifice on which Christianity itself is based: crucifixion. Cook indeed died for the Hawaiians' sins; in the wake of his death came a discourse on "improvement," and "renunciation" on the part of the Hawaiians. On leaving the islands, Russian explorer Lisiansky remarked that the friendly manner, honesty, and hospitality shown him by the Islanders demonstrated "how much they have improved since the time of Cook" (1814, 137). Similarly, Dampier wrote, "With the death of Cook, vanished the hostility of the islanders, & Nahi assured us that they regretted exceedingly what they had done. They even now look upon this event as a sort of national stigma upon their character & generally endeavor to evade all conversation relating to it" (1971, 66). Despite the intrusion of Cook into the islands, his initial hospitable reception, later imposition, and final bombardment and slaughter by his ships, the incident became a stigma on the Hawaiians—treated as such by the west, and acknowledged as such at least by some Hawaiians, if only to mollify relations and gain trade.⁴

The overall symbolic impact of Cook's death and figurative resurrection is a symbolic conquest of the islands by Cook, or by Europeans on his behalf. The islands were brought strongly under the European colonial gaze. Every commissioned explorer who stepped ashore thereafter was another potential Cook, worthy (to his thinking) of the same regal or godly treatment and on whom the Hawaiians would presumably not

want to make the same mistake. Cook's death is the "Remember Pearl Harbor" of the late eighteenth–early nineteenth century, though his ships were the ones that bombarded this particular harbor.

KAPU AND PUNISHMENT AT THE HANDS OF EUROPEANS

Cook and his crew were acquainted with the concept of *tabu*. On his initial stop at Kaua'i, Cook noted the presence of *tabu* in the Hawaiian Islands, and he and Captain King well understood what was meant when their observatory area was rendered *kapu* by the priests. There was no doubt that *kapu* was a religious edict. It accords, then, with the rest of Cook's apotheosis by the British, that when his crew prepared to perform last rites, they ordered a chief to place a *kapu* on the bay. The next day, after Cook's remains had been "committed to the deep with the usual military honours," the chief was asked to remove the *kapu*. This coalescence of the use of *kapu* with military honors as a religious service for the dead, would reappear with Pearl Harbor and the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. As with so many other things, for westerners the first instance of this combination occurred with Cook.

The sacredness accorded to Cook by both the Hawaiians and the British stands in stark contrast to British attitudes toward Hawaiian sacred law. Earlier, when Kealakekua Bay was rendered *kapu* in preparation for the arrival of the high chief, the action prevented trade with Cook's ships and angered the British. The crews endeavored "by threats and promises" to induce the Hawaiians to come out, in violation of the *kapu*. Some did venture out, and when a chief tried to drive them away, the British immediately fired a musket over his head, "to make him desist, which had the desired effect" (Cook and King 1784, 3:16). While showing such disregard for the *kapu* on the one hand, the British used it to their own advantage on the other. So began the bilingual use of the term that displaced it from Hawaiian sacred law to haole social control, simultaneously replacing the Hawaiian *ali'i* with haole authority—sometimes with deadly consequences.

In the years shortly after Cook's death, the use of *kapu* by westerners (or by the *ali'i* at westerners' request) combined with westerners' simultaneous ability to break Hawaiian *kapu* with impunity—and their insistence on doing so. In this way westerners elevated their status and positioned themselves as a ruling class, as *ali'i*. Their ability to do this

capitalized on the status gained by the bombardment of Kealakekua Bay, the overall show of superior force, and the willingness to punish with death.

Kapu was used by haoles at first for control and maintaining order. Portlock, finding his ship overrun by “daring and insolent” Islanders and so surrounded by canoes that he could not weigh anchor, used a combination of *kapu* and the threat of violence to resolve the situation: “[A]ccordingly, after drawing out the shot, we fired six four-pounders and six swivels; at the same time our colours were hoisted, and the ships tabooed, by hoisting a white flag at the main-topgallant-mast-head: this had the desired effect; for, immediately on our beginning to fire, the Indians made for the shore with the utmost precipitation” (1789, 63–64). These would have been the same “Indians” fired on by Cook’s ships not ten years before, an event no doubt well recalled for the extent of the violence and the visible scarring of the landscape.

When canoes came alongside La Pérouse’s ship and their occupants tried to board, La Pérouse acted similarly: “I told them that I was taboo, a word which I had learned from the English accounts, and which was attended with all the success I expected.”⁵ Kotzebue “declared the ship taboo for some days, to be able to do some necessary work” (1821a, 1:327). Through a Hawaiian, Golovnin “made the people understand that at sunset, as soon as the flag is lowered and the gun fired, the sloop will become *tabu* and all the boats must leave. This last order was carried out and they did not trouble us during the night” (1979, 176).

But in other cases, *kapu* was used by westerners to enable violent punishment and death. The most notable such incident, now known as the Olowalu Massacre, occurred around 1794 when Hawaiians allegedly stole a boat from Captain Metcalf’s ship, killed the man guarding it, and the next day brought his bones to sell. Captain Metcalf

went into such a rage that he ordered all his guns loaded with grape shot and the hinges of the ports greased and after he got his vessel all clear for action he got one of the chiefs to taboo one side of her so that he might have a good chance to fulfill his desire The taboo on one side of Captain Metcalf’s brig brought all the natives over on the opposite side. The captain then ordered all hands to heave beads overboard to draw the natives as near as possible to the vessel and when he had collected upwards of three hundred canoes alongside he called out “Anthony,” the name of the man who was

killed, as a signal for his men to fire. They did so and killed upwards of three hundred men, women and children. (Bartlett 1925, 309)

Believing that the Hawaiians had stolen their anchor, Metcalf's ship later "got under way and fired four or five broadsides into the village. We could see thousands of natives running, one on top of the other" (Bartlett 1925, 312).

The most significant symbolic turnover into the hands of the westerners of the power to impose *kapu* and execute human beings occurred with the visits of Vancouver, 1792–1794. Following the death of Cook, Vancouver aimed to establish relations with the Hawaiians, and press gently for an extension of British sovereignty over the islands. This, it must be recalled, was not far in the wake of the punishment wrought by Cook's ships that demonstrated the deadly armaments of the British Navy. Vancouver made liberal use of *kapu*: when a chief requested muskets in exchange for provisions, the captain "informed him, that the ship, and every thing she contained, belonged to His Majesty King George, who had tabooed muskets, pistols, and various other articles" (1801, 2:470).

Here again, the British felt they had appropriated the power of *kapu*, that their use of this power was equivalent in meaning and superior in efficacy to that of the Hawaiians. How this use of the term in the mouths of various westerners was understood by Hawaiians is uncertain. What is certain, however, is that law was being imposed, backed by deadly fire-power and a willingness to use it. Vancouver pointed out that he acted "under special authority of our sovereign, who had given me power . . . to requite the barbarity of the natives with the severest punishment" (1801, 2:855). In doing so he co-opted the Hawaiians' sacredness-ascribed high-ranking *ali'i* with the parallel but supposedly superior sacredness of the British monarch.⁶ Appropriating the power of *kapu* for the British, he positioned himself as having the power to enforce the British *kapu* with death, even on Hawaiian soil.

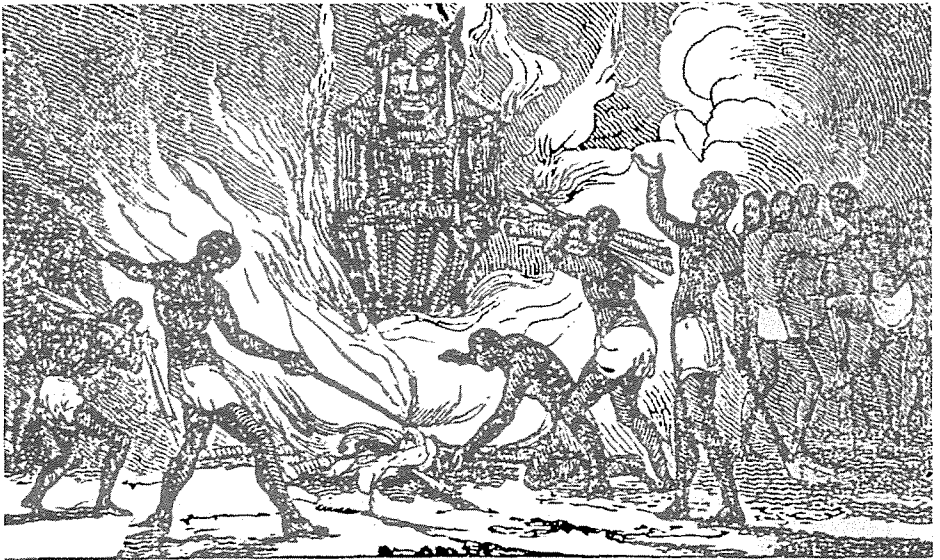
This right to punish was put to the test after two of Vancouver's men were killed in a skirmish on O'ahu. Vancouver's relentless and obsessive pursuit of "justice" was an exercise in the establishment of British law and order in the islands. Though local chiefs explained that three men responsible had already been put to death, Vancouver insisted that, nonetheless, three or four other men known to have been principles in the

matter, should be punished by the Hawaiians—but alongside the British ship, in full spectacle of the Islanders.⁷ The Hawaiians were to be instructed that no one who shall commit such “acts of barbarity” would be excused or escape punishment as long as the English continued to visit these islands. The public execution was carried out and “that the ceremony might be made as solemn and as awful as possible, a guard of seamen and marines were drawn up” alongside the ship. Afterward, Vancouver proposed that “the dead bodies be hung upon a tree near the shore, to deter others from committing the like offenses” (1801, 2:859, 880–881).

The sacrifice of these men to establish the principles of British justice on Hawaiian shores, stands in the face of western constructions of the Hawaiians’ own legal system (the *kapu*), its punishment with death sentence and human sacrifice. Kotzebue declared that “it would be unjust to upbraid the Owhyeeans” for human sacrifice, as “They sacrifice culprits to their gods, as we sacrifice them in Europe to justice” (Kotzebue 1821, 3:248). Lisiansky remarked that “The human sacrifice is only practiced on prisoners and rebellious subjects, and is therefore more a political than a religious institution” (1814, 120–121). But from 1820 on, any comparison or similarity between European and Hawaiian law is strenuously overlooked. On the contrary, the Hawaiian punishment by death and human sacrifice for breaking certain *kapu* became the focus of western discourse about the Dread Taboo. The representation of the Hawaiian legal-religious system—and the *ali‘i* who controlled it—as unjust, arbitrary, and oppressive, naturalized the establishment of western law as “civilized,” just, and fair. The not-too-gradual movement from Hawaiian sacred law to American-Christian sacred law necessarily entailed a shift in the power to impose and execute law. That is, the role of *ali‘i* was displaced from Hawaiians to westerners. The “end of the *kapu* system”—an incomplete revolution that in western discourse became a turning point for Hawaiians from barbarism to civilization—was the herald for incoming western law and social control. Though the Hawaiian *ali‘i* retained power, that power became increasingly nominal as the authorities in western law—westerners—introduced a new *kapu* system. Starting with recreating the sacred, this new system would eventually become as all-encompassing and complex as the old, ranging from social behavior to control over land. But in this new western system, the westerners would act as the *ali‘i*.

THE NEW *KAPU*: CHRISTIAN MORALITY AND THE LAW

As Protestant missionaries from New England were en route to the islands, King Kamehameha died, and his son Liholiho, under pressure from his stepmother Ka'ahumanu, publicly brought an end to the traditional *kapu* system. Most important, this eventuated in the inability of the ruling chief (now king) to sanctify *luakini*, the *heiau* of human sacrifice that emblemized the power of his sacred position. However, the chiefly power to impose *kapu* did not end, nor did the everyday religious lives of the people, but the idols at most—not all—*heiau* were burned, and the sacredness of those places officially rendered profane. To the western world, which knew of Hawai'i already as the sacred ground of Cook's martyrdom, this sudden turn of events was astounding. The "evil" and "barbarous" tradition of human sacrifice at their "char-



Sandwich Islanders burning an Idol.

POLYNESIA.

FIGURE 4. This is one of only three illustrations in the Pacific Islands section of Mitchell's 1843 *School Geography*. The entire complex of Christian notions of evil is projected onto the *kapu* system and Hawaiian religion through the Satan-like representation of the idol.

nel house” temples was no longer. That a savage people would willingly cast off their centuries-old superstitions was deemed a remarkable act of civilized behavior. Hawai‘i’s place on the discursive map became significantly larger. Geography texts of the 1800s, which paid little more than lip-service to the existence of Pacific islands, included special mention of Hawai‘i, now the site of two important events. When the high chief Kapi‘olani, having embraced Christianity, literally went a step further by entering the crater of Kilauea in defiance of the goddess Pele, Tennyson wrote a poem commemorating the event.

But the overthrow of the *kapu* system was not without its own human sacrifices to the new, as yet unformed, order. True, some Islanders were willing from the very beginning of western intercourse to violate the *kapu*. The authority of the sacred *kapu* had been called into question since Cook’s arrival, in Hawaiian eyes, by the ability of westerners to break it with impunity. But within the power struggle among the *ali‘i* were staunch defenders of the system who took up arms and fought. According to one account, about one hundred fell in the final battle on the island of Hawai‘i, and many more were wounded (*MH*, June 1821, 176). The use of violence and bloodshed to enforce this change of politics was rapidly forgotten in the western mythologizing of the event. The fact remains that there were those who lost their lives trying to defend the old order.

The popular version, perpetuated immediately after the news reached the west, was that the Hawaiians had voluntarily and unanimously given up their old faith. Even one of the missionaries stated that the overthrow and burning of idols occurred “with no dissent, much less opposition, except that, in the former of these islands [Hawai‘i], a chief of secondary influence stood aloof from the whole proceeding, and preserved an idol” (*MH*, Dec 1820, 570). But the ongoing reports of the missionaries made it clear that this was not a unanimous act, nor did it disturb the personal religion of individuals, as missionaries continued for decades to beat on doors demanding that the Hawaiians give up their personal idols, which were then burned. When Byron’s crew pillaged the still-sacred *heiau* at Kealakekua Bay, it was four years after the alleged “end of idolatry.”

For the missionaries, however, this change of events was a sign from God. They stated shortly after their arrival that “Jehovah has begun to

overturn the institutions of idolatry, and to prepare the way for the nobler institutions of his worship." While they were on their way to the islands, "He was casting down the vanities of the heathen, demolishing the temples of paganism, and holding in derision the former pride and disgrace of this people" (*MH*, April 1821, 111). They admitted that one of the principle means by which "Providence" brought this about was the "continually repeated assurance of our sea-captains and sailors [to the Hawaiians], that the whole system of idolatry was foolish and stupid"—that the anti-*kapu* discourse of the haoles had a hand in bringing about this cultural change.

It is a curious juxtaposition that what the missionaries described as the "forbidding but tottering taboo system, which had been founded on ignorance, cemented with blood, and supported for ages by the basest of human passions," was to be supplanted by laws of a new punishing, wrathful god who "graciously accepts every cheerful sacrifice." Missionaries "urge[d] sinners of every class and condition to *flee from the wrath to come*"; to "love his character" but "fear his holy name" lest they too come to die as sacrifices—that is, without salvation (*MH*, April 1821, 111). The new law of the Christian god, like the *kanawai akua*, was based on fear of this punishing supernatural deity.⁸

Assuming that the end of the *kapu* system had created a moral and spiritual "vacuum," the Protestant missionaries saw the opportunity to provide a new religio-legal structure—a Christian moral and social code. Their letter back to headquarters in Connecticut remarked that "The people are without any form of religion, waiting, as it were, for the law of Christ, though they know not his name, nor the way of salvation" (*MH*, April 1821, 112). Though Reverend Dibble's history (1843) asserted that the Ten Commandments were adopted as the basis of a criminal code—a misstatement that nonetheless became legend—their influence was manifested when a high-ranking *ali'i*, Kalanimoku, urged that the chiefs "give their united public testimony in favor of [the Ten Commandments] being observed, and even to enjoin their people to obey them" (Westervelt 1909, 44–45). This injunction was translated into material form with the aid of a powerful tool over which the missionaries had exclusive control: the printing press.⁹ The "Thoughts of the Chiefs" on the matter of following the Ten Commandments became an eight-page text in Hawaiian, *Ka Mana'o o na Alii*, a series of exhortations by the highest chiefs in the land, worded in the language of the Decalogue. The chiefs and people were

urged to turn from their “deceitful gods” (*akua hoopunipuni*), to love Jehova—“him only, have no other gods”—and Jesus Christ, to attend to the Laws of Jehova and keep the Sabbath—called the *lā kapu*, or taboo day. This publication was released simultaneously with *Ke Kanawai o Jehova* (“Law of Jehova”—the Ten Commandments)—both printed in December 1825. Through juxtaposing these exhortations by the *aliʻi* with the Ten Commandments, the missionaries’ labors succeeded in establishing a Christian code as the basis for personal, social, and legal behavior.

In the years that followed, printed government broadsheets *He Olelo No Ke Kanawai* and *He Poe Kinai Ona Rama* declared licentiousness, bigamy, adultery, rum-drinking, gambling, and not keeping the Sabbath—along with theft and murder—to be punishable offenses. The so-called Cow Proclamation of 7 October 1829, by Kamehameha the Third, stated unambiguously, “The Law of the Great God of Heaven, that is the great thing by which we shall promote peace; let all men who remain here obey it.”

These laws were not simply the early “superstitious” musings of “former savages.” The Penal Code of 1850, Chapter 35 on “Disturbing religious worship—Violating the Sabbath” stated:

1. Whoever willfully interrupts or disturbs any religious assembly for religious worship . . . shall be punished by imprisonment at hard labor not more than thirty days, or by fine not exceeding fifteen dollars, in the discretion of the court.

2. The Lord’s day is *taboo*: All worldly business, amusements and recreation are forbidden on that day; and whoever shall keep open his shop, store, warehouse, or workshop, or shall do any manner of labor, business or work except only works of necessity and charity, or be present at any dancing, public amusement, show or entertainment, or take part in any game, sport or play on the Lord’s day, shall be punished by fine not exceeding ten dollars. (Hawaiʻi 1869)

Though Frear (1906) stated that the end of the *kapu* system brought the divorce of political and religious systems (thus dispelling what he called “one of the greatest obstacles to the growth of a young nation”), the Christian basis of law was not lost with the ongoing modernization of society. As the islands became increasingly Americanized, the civil-religious morality of American democracy took different legal forms. The constitution of 1864, Article 2, stated “All men are free to worship God according to the dictates of their own consciences; but this sacred privi-

lege hereby secured, shall not be so construed as to justify acts of licentiousness, or practices inconsistent with the peace or safety of the Kingdom.” Intended as a declaration of religious freedom, the wording of this article could foreseeably prohibit traditional Hawaiian and other pantheistic religions. Laws against all forms of “sorcery” reinforced the relegation of Hawaiian religion to outlaw status. One might worship God, but tolerance for paganism was not guaranteed. As late as 1897 under the “American” rule of the Republican government, the *Penal Laws of the Hawaiian Islands* (Section 316) posed “violating the Sabbath” as a crime punishable by fine or imprisonment for thirty days at hard labor (1897). Chapter 34, Section 2 of the 1869 Penal Code showed an even greater intolerance:

Whoever blasphemes the holy name of God, by denying, cursing, or contumeliously reproaching God, His creation, government, or final judging of the world, or by cursing or contumeliously reproaching Jesus Christ or the Holy Ghost, or by cursing or contumeliously reproaching the holy word of God, contained in the holy scriptures or exposing them to contempt or ridicule, shall be punished by imprisonment at hard labor not more than one year, or by fine not exceeding one hundred dollars. (Hawai‘i 1869)

So much for the separation of church and state. The legal reification of Christianity came at the expense of any rights granted the old religion. In fact, early admonitions against “idolatry” by the Protestant missionaries led the chiefs to pass laws against Catholicism, because Catholics were seen to be idol worshippers.

THE NEW ALI‘I: PRIVATIZATION OF LAND OWNERSHIP

The “Blue Laws” of 1840 outlined and delimited the powers of chiefs and tax collectors to place a *kapu* on resources—the manner of managing the natural products of land and sea in the traditional fashion. With land still under the traditional control of chiefs, the common people were still obliged to provide days of labor on the chief’s lands, and to pay taxes in produce from their own lands, still held under tenure of the *ali‘i* and *konohiki*. Twenty years after the end of the *kapu* system, *kapu* and control of land and resources remained in the hands of the *ali‘i*.

William Ladd, writing in 1838, asserted that “the exclusive right” of the *ali‘i* to the commoners’ labor, which he identified as “the first natural

resource” of the islands, “alike forbids the idea of freedom, the development of intellect, or the acquisition of property. Hence, one principle cause that is fast diminishing the native population” (1838, 74).

This statement, typical of the period, employed tropes diverting attention to welfare of the Hawaiians based on American principles of freedom, equality, and most important, property. Ladd had established a sugar plantation in 1835, and was suffering under the uncertain land tenure held, it was thought, at the whim of fickle *ali'i*. “Freedom,” “development of the intellect,” and “cause” of the “fast diminishing population” were invoked to justify the transformation of the traditional land tenure and labor system. Ladd knew his audience: the missionaries wanted these “indolent natives” to become “industrious”—the Protestant work ethic manifesting in the coalescence of industry with righteousness, of civilization with Christianity. The *ali'i* control over land and their ability to tax the produce of the common people to what the missionaries considered exorbitant amounts, was a malingering remnant of the Dread Taboo. The privatization of land would break the oppressive grip of the *ali'i* and allow the development of industrious habits among the Hawaiians. Let the farmers own the land, let their produce be protected from the plunder of the chiefs, and they will come to understand the incentive principle. With private property and a cash economy, the common people will become petty capitalists, working hard for God while striving for profits. Such was the haole line of argument.

The privatization of land that was supposed to free the Hawaiians, American-style, instead resulted in the emergence of what can be seen as a new hierarchy of *ali'i*. The 1848 *mabele* distributed lands into three major categories: private lands (both *konohiki* lands, belonging to the chiefs, which constituted large claims; and later the *kuleana* lands of the commoners, which constituted far less), plus the two categories of Crown lands (for the king and his heirs) and Government lands, under jurisdiction of the kingdom. With land commodified, plantations bought or leased larger and larger tracts, and more and more land moved into the hands of foreign owners, especially with the expansion of the sugar industry after 1875. As land became increasingly concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer people, the “common people” of the islands, including the vast numbers of imported laborers, became landless wage-laborers. Controlling land, labor, and economy, plantation owners became the new “*ali'i*” of the islands—not *ali'i* in the true sense, that is, as occupying that

culturally specific status among Hawaiians, but as “*ali‘i*” within the new “sacred” culture of private property. These new *ali‘i* were comparable to the old in certain important ways.

First, within the new Christian basis of society, the major plantation owners were “closest to the gods.” That is, they were missionaries and their descendants. “The foreigners are creeping in among the natives, getting their largest and best lands, water privileges, building lots, etc,” wrote missionary Amos Starr Cooke in 1851; “Our large plain of sand is now covered with vegetation and is laid out into lots. I am proposing, ere long, to purchase some of them” (MacDonald 1944, 9).

The legacy of Amos Cooke and the little trading firm he began with fellow missionary S N Castle would become the current multinational corporation Castle & Cooke. By the early 1900s, this was one of the “Big Five” sugar companies that, along with Alexander & Baldwin, C Brewer, Theo H Davies, and AMFAC, are said to have run the islands like a feudal estate. Like the *ali‘i* of old, these families maintain and make public their genealogies and engage in intermarriage to consolidate power. Alexander & Baldwin proudly presented its genealogies in a special 1990 commemorative edition of its quarterly magazine *Ampersand*. Herein are charted for all to see, the intermarriages not only between the Alexander and the Baldwin families, but with the families of Samuel Castle and Amos Cooke as well.

A different sort of intermarriage took place at the administrative level. The trustees of the various companies simultaneously sat not only on each other’s boards of directors, but on the boards of each other’s subsidiary companies linked to the plantations. A network of influence and control extended from the plantations to the banks, the utility companies, and the transportation companies. This corporate incestuousness served to consolidate power much the way physical incestuousness consolidated *mana*.

Second is the control of labor. Under the old *ali‘i*, all of the commoners owed one or two days a week of labor on the chief’s land. With the new *ali‘i*, most people in the islands worked on the plantations or for one of the many subsidiary industries controlled by the Big Five. True, some managed to escape the system and become private entrepreneurs, but the labor of the majority was owned by the new *ali‘i*. For the many contract laborers brought in from the Asia-Pacific region, who became a major component of the population, there was little prospect of escape. Whereas

before, the *ali'i* controlled some of the labor of all of the people, in the new system, the landowning powers controlled all of the labor of some of the people.

“Masters and Servants” laws furthered this power by virtually legalizing bonded servitude under contract. While a few clauses in the law protected the servant against the abuses of the master, the language was much more precise and specific regarding penalties for the servant who ran off or was guilty of “gross misbehavior, or refusal to do his duty, or willful neglect thereof.” A judge could sentence such a servant to serve “double the time of his absence,” or up to three months’ hard labor in prison (Hawai‘i 1869, Chapter 78).

Third is the control of land. The extent to which large private landholdings, even today, maintain much of the shape of the *ahupua‘a* system—large wedges running from the mountains to the sea—suggests that while the system of *kālai‘āina*, political control of land, has changed in the islands, the form retains its original flavor.¹⁰ The plantations not only acquired enormous tracts of land, even using subsidiary companies to get around laws prohibiting monopoly accumulation, but embarked on enormous irrigation projects to divert water to their plantations.

As *konohiki*-landlords, the plantations housed their laborers in company-owned housing tracts, often organized by ethnic group to inhibit a sense of solidarity among the workers. There was no certainty of land tenure. In the early plantation years, the workers were paid in chits to buy their goods at the company store—at highly inflated prices. In this way a portion of their own “produce” was “taxed” by the new landlord. In later years, charges for room, board, and other services accomplished the same objective.

Such was the power of these new *ali'i* that, when in 1893 they felt their business interests threatened by the Hawaiian government, they overthrew that government, making themselves both the *de jure* and the *de facto* ruling chiefs of the islands. With the new title of Government of the Republic of Hawaii, these men then assumed control over not only the Government lands (as they were now the government) but the Crown lands as well. Their reasoning was that the new government—housed in ‘Iolani Palace (renamed the Executive Building)—assumed the position formerly held by the Crown and, therefore, entitlement to the Crown lands as well.

The Hawaiian *kapu-ali'i* system had come to be replaced by a Chris-

tian-American system based on allegedly secular ideals of freedom and private property, but in fact retaining much of the form and function attributed to the ancient structure.

THE NEW *ALI'I*: THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND THE US MILITARY

Annexation of the new republic to the United States in 1898 simply laid new tiers of *ali'i* over the existing system, keeping in place much of the structure and personnel from the republic. President Sanford B Dole became the first governor under the new ruling chief, the president of the United States. The symbolic shift of the “crown” from the Hawaiian monarchy to this agent of the United States Government is represented in Withington’s tale of an old Hawaiian, in a lei and ragged straw hat, sweeping the grass in downtown Honolulu:

I was surprised when the old man suddenly took off his hat and stood as if at attention, and I was amazed when I heard him exclaim: “Ka Moi! Ka Moi!” (“The King! The King!”)

I glanced quickly around and saw our Governor coming down the palace steps. Clutching his hat in one hand and still holding the bamboo broom, the old Hawaiian stood erect until the Governor and his aides had driven away in their car. . . .

As I turned away I thought that he had probably been in the King’s service when he was young, and, like many of the older generation of the Hawaiian people, still held allegiance to the reigning power within the palace. . . .

The palace today houses our legislature, but it still retains the reflected glory of royal days. (Withington 1937, 1)

The story poses that, for the “older generation of Hawaiians,” the transfer of power from their own monarchy to the territorial government was a seamless flow, that one was the same as the other. The old man’s reverence for “our Governor” as “the King” and the transformation of the palace into “our” house of legislature—retaining “the reflected glory of royal days”—reinforced as fitting and appropriate the royal position that the new government had assumed. At the same time, the notion of “our Governor” ambiguously asserted both the “equal” rights now granted all American citizens in the islands (our Governor = our Hawai’i), while suggesting the displacement of the Hawaiians to a lower class: it is *our* governor, who now rules over *them*. The extent to which representa-

tions of the Hawaiians themselves changed with annexation (into “children”) supports this reading. Most important, Withington’s tale glossed over the struggle to restore self-rule, erasing Hawaiian resistance and solidifying the idea that the federal government was the new *aliʻi*.

With the federal government’s accession to power, a new *kālaiʻāina* or division of land occurred. The federal government took control of the Ceded Lands, formerly the Crown and Government lands, in so doing asserting its position as the new Crown. On the small scale, this government still redistributed land to the *makaʻāinana* like the chiefs of old through the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920.¹¹

Prior to Cook, Hawaiians maintained a subsistence economy based on communal land tenure. Although land was controlled by the *aliʻi*, everyone had rights of access and use to the resources within the *ahupuaʻa*, a large pie-shaped wedge running from the mountains to the sea (Kelly 1980, 57). Having lost both these rights and much of the land through privatization, under this Act they are given a new right to lease public land from the new government (for 99 or 999 years, at nominal cost). These may as well be called the new *konohiki* lands. Where the *makaʻāinana* of old were described as oppressed peasants who “held” their land at the whim of the *aliʻi*, Hawaiian homesteaders are there at the discretion of the new *aliʻi*. And inasmuch as, in the old days, the best farmers were put on the best land, in the new days that means the best lands are reserved for the plantations,¹² while the “peasant farmer” class formed by landless native Hawaiians is relegated to the leftover, undesirable plots—often lacking water rights reserved by the plantations. But where the old system guaranteed access to resources throughout the *ahupuaʻa* ecological zone, the homestead system retains the grid of “private” property parcels that fragments land and society, aiming to promote capitalist entrepreneurs rather than a communal economy.

THE NEW KAPU: MILITARY SPACE

Meanwhile, the various branches of the US military represent the on-site presence of the federal government in the islands. In the territorial period from 1900 to 1959, and less so after statehood, the military gained the highest power of *kapu*, which, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, became almost absolute.

Three sets of practices exemplifying the power and symbolic domi-

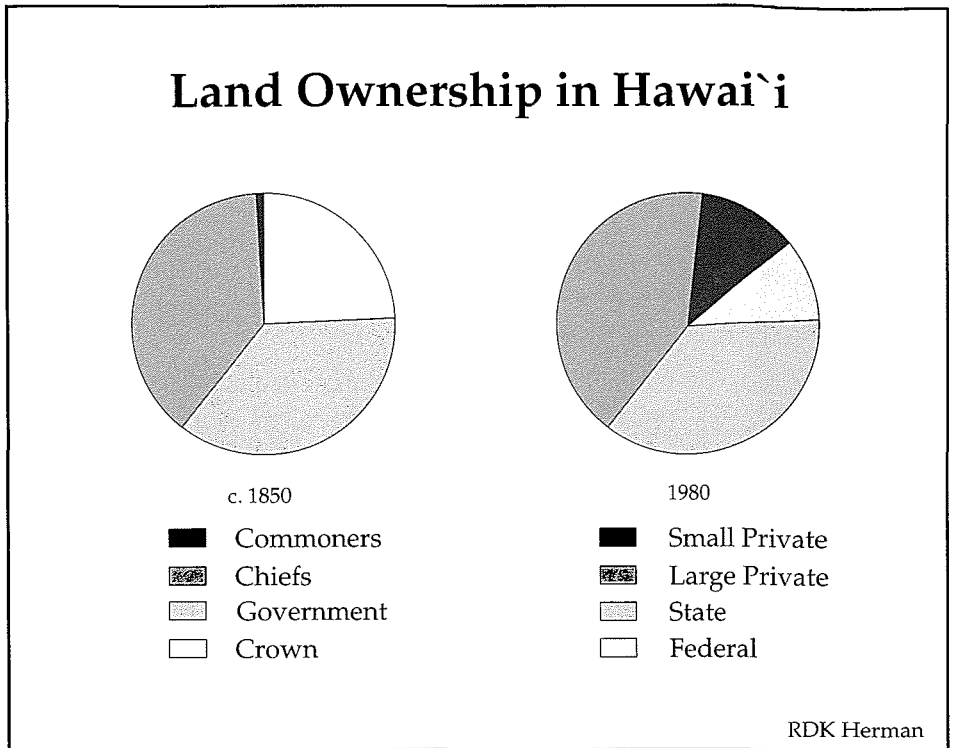


FIGURE 5. The division of lands after the 1848 *mabehle* (left) and in 1980 (right). The major difference lies in the rise in small private landowners, who still control only a minority of the land. Based on figures provided by the Department of Hawaiian Homelands and the *Atlas of Hawaii*.

nance of this new ruling class are its ability to “*kapu*” land and resources for its own use, its ability to make or break laws or retain special privilege, and its creation of new sacred spaces glorifying itself and its own human sacrifices.

The military can acquire land by leasing it, condemning it, or taking it through executive order. While the last two are indistinguishable from placing *kapu* sticks on the land, leasing also retains a trace of the Dread Taboo. In 1964 the state leased land to the federal government under the threat of alternatively having that land taken outright by executive order (Tummons 1992). Governor John Burns was “forced” to lease more than thirty thousand acres, in seven leases, at \$1.00 per acre per year to the federal government for sixty-five years—much of which was and is Hawaiian Homes Commission Land (Rohrer 1987, 3:8–9). These

leases were contracted under the threat of executive *kapu*, and show the military's ability to acquire land at far below market value—even to take it away from the new *maka'āinana*, the Hawaiian homesteaders.

Such leases generally require the military to return the land in safe condition when no longer needed, but provisions in them also allow the military to condemn the land if the cost of clean-up exceeds fair market value (Tummons, 1992). Lands deemed too costly for such clean-up are labeled “sacrifice lands.”

Condemning land under other circumstances occurs when a government agency desires a certain parcel for a particular purpose, places a price tag on that land, and offers that price to the owner, who can either accept the price or take the issue to court. If the owner lacks the financial resources to take the case to court, then there is no choice but to accept the offer.

The prices offered by the government do not reflect the market value of the property or the cost to the owner of relocating. During the Second World War, it was estimated that Navy offers for condemned properties were only one-quarter to one-third the cost for the occupant to replace that property. Seventy percent of owners accepted without question the amount offered—some for patriotic reasons, but many for fear of the powerful government agencies involved. This was especially true of non-white residents, who generally lacked funds to fight cases in court.¹³ Some residents complained of the “threatening” tactics used by the navy. The Dread Taboo rides again. Significantly, the navy in turn became a major landholder in the islands, and landlord-*konohiki* as well—renting out lands on a month-to-month basis, often for rents higher than what was previously charged.¹⁴

It is noteworthy that particular losers in the condemnation process were, again, the *maka'āinana*: Native Hawaiians put back on the land under the government's Hawaiian Homestead Commissions Act. Since these people leased their land from the government, they did not own it and could not be compensated at all. In one case, a homesteader lost not only his five-acre plot, but his house, his crop, and the irrigation facilities he had installed. He received nothing. An ancient chief might as well have come and put *kapu* sticks on this commoner's land.

During the Second World War, massive amounts of land in the islands not already held by the military were transformed into military bases and practice ranges. Although much of this land has been returned, the legacy

of the military remains in its transformation of public lands into “sacrifice lands,” *kapu* until further notice. . . .

The case of Waikane Valley—land leased by the military—is exemplary. After two decades of using the land for “air-to-ground ordnance delivery,” an action to quiet land titles gave members of the Kamaka family 187 acres of Waikane Valley that, unknown to them, had been an important impact area for the shelling. Under the lease agreement, the federal government was obliged to clear the land before returning it. Marine Corps sweeps removed more than sixteen thousand tons of unexploded ordnance, yet the land was still not rendered ordnance-free. Rejecting alternatives proposed by the Kamaka family, the government acquired funds and condemned the land in 1989. Fences were erected, with “Keep Out” signs warning of the danger of the unexploded ordnance.

This action presents a new and different kind of *kapu* land, whose parallel to Hawaiian *kapu* space is profound. For Hawaiians, sacred or *kapu* spaces are always dangerous because, above and beyond potential punishment by the *ali'i*, they are inhabited by deities and spirits possessed of awesome, potentially destructive powers. Now, in this new sacred space, violation can still be punished—if inadvertently—with injury and death. Like guardian spirits of the land, unexploded ordnance may punish those who break the *kapu* by entering the forbidden area. At least eleven civilian deaths plus many injuries are attributed to the duds left in the land since the Second World War. Many valleys and nearly all offshore islands were used as bombing ranges by the military. A 24 June 1948 article in the *Honolulu Advertiser* stated that Manana (Rabbit Island) and Kaho'olawe were “*kapu*” because entering these lands could result in death. The US military, in usurping the power of *ali'i* to designate sacred space, have littered these lands with instruments of their own *mana*, and in refusing to clean them up, have set themselves apart from the law.

Apart from land in general, the military wielded other powers of *kapu*. Military laws of the Territory of Hawai'i (1926, paragraph 38) stated that “Any portion of the national guard parading, drilling or performing any military duty when regularly ordered and according to law, shall have right of way in any street or highway through which they may pass.” Paragraph 39 stated that commanding officers might fix boundaries and limits to parade or encampment areas—establishing forbidden space,



FIGURE 6. Military designating *kapu* space: Aloha Tower during the war. (*Honolulu Star-Bulletin* photo from Brown 1989; reprinted with permission)

where intruders might be arrested. How is this significantly different from what occurred during Lord Byron's procession onto shore in the 1820s, as related by Dampier (1971, 36): "The road was tabooed, ie kept sacred, so that the Natives could not approach very near to us"? The signs on fences around military bases, including those formerly around Pearl Harbor, often read "*Kapu*."¹⁵

The extent to which the military and their blood relations were above the law is further seen in the infamous Massey case, in which members of a prominent haole family received a commuted sentence of one hour in the judge's office, for murdering a Native Hawaiian accused—but acquitted—of raping the wife of a military officer. Around the same time, a report on *Law Enforcement in the Territory* stated that "There is no evidence that the number of crimes committed by the service personnel in Honolulu is in excess of *what must be reasonably expected* in view of the large number of soldiers and sailors involved" (US Senate 1932, 68; my emphasis).

After the morning attack on 7 December 1941, martial law was declared in the islands. General Short proclaimed himself "Military Governor." The next day the civil courts were closed by military order, and the writ of habeas corpus suspended. Virtually absolute power of *kapu* went into the hands of the military. Housed in 'Iolani Palace—now rendered *kapu* by barbed wire—the military governor issued a series of "General Orders" controlling land, resources, labor, and even behavior in the islands.

What they needed, they took. A serviceman wrote that a particular building "appeared to be the only place available to set up a Headquarters . . . [so it] was requisitioned and occupied by the American Rule of 'take it and argue it out afterwards' " (Brown 1989, 68). Barbed wire and "Restricted Area" signs kept civilians out of *kapu* areas. Pleasure travel to the islands was prohibited, and barbed wire marking the perimeter—along the beaches—designated that these islands were now a military-controlled zone. General Orders designated not only *kapu* spaces; the military government penetrated virtually all levels of civil activity in the islands.

Determination of the law became an arbitrary matter at the whim of the military governor. Anthony stated that

The unfamiliarity of the legal staff of the military governor with elementary principles of law was apparent every day. However, since they not only made the decrees but enforced and interpreted them in military courts, the anomalies were rarely exposed publicly. There was no separation of powers. All power had coalesced into a single hand—the military governor whose word was law. (1955, 57)

Martial law included the imposition of blackout and curfew hours, from sundown to sunrise. Not so much as a crack of light from an ill-fitting curtain was permitted, and sentences were imposed without regard to the facts of a violation (Anthony 1955, 58). Blackout restrictions were not lifted even once it was clear they were no longer necessary, which Anthony suggested was because that would have indicated that martial law was itself no longer necessary. Meanwhile, this *kapu* was not applied to the military posts themselves or to the waterfront in Honolulu, both of them lit up like Christmas trees amidst the otherwise blackened night-scape.



FIGURE 7. Barbed wire on the beach. The islands were off limits to pleasure travel during the war. The *haoles* seen here must be military or local residents. (National Archives photo from Brown 1989; reprinted with permission)

At the termination of martial law in late 1942, the president signed an executive order authorizing the military to designate the Territory of Hawai‘i—the entire archipelago—a “military area.” This was done immediately, and the military governor retained control. Curfew and blackout (now 10:00 PM to 5:30 AM) were maintained for another three years.¹⁶

Hawaiian sacred sites that came into the hands of the federal government suffered one of at least two fates.¹⁷ At least four *heiau* were used as targets for artillery practice, and were obliterated. Certain other *heiau* were appropriated into the new, civil-sacred space of national parks and national historical monuments, where bronze plaques identify them as being of particular value to the history of *the United States*. Through these two means, some Hawaiian sacred sites were rendered nonexistent, while others became part of the landscape of US nationalism.

In one high-profile case, these two conflicting actions coincided. Eisenhower's Executive Order 10436 of 1953 took possession of the entire island of Kaho'olawe, previously designated a National Historical Site. Declaring the island "*kapu*" by executive order caused it to become the primary site for naval target practice. By asserting on the one hand that Kaho'olawe is a meaningful landscape worthy of being placed on the national register, while on the other hand sanctioning the bombardment and obliteration of that landscape, the federal government showed the true extent of its power to make and break its own *kapu*. The nominal sacredness accorded to things Hawaiian dissolves in the face of US "national security."

The executive order stated that "When there is no longer a need for the use of the area hereby reserved . . . for Naval purposes of the United States, the Department of the Navy shall . . . render such area, or such portion thereof, reasonably safe for human habitation, without cost to the Territory." Decades of struggle by Native Hawaiians to end the bombing brought enough pressure to bear that in 1991 the bombing was stopped. However, the cost of clean-up was determined to be too high, while the extent of the damage to the island became more clearly known to the civilian population. Exercising its position above the law, the military determined that the island could not be cleared of ordnance to the point of safety at a cost it was willing to pay.

Like those condemned lands used for target practice, much of Kaho'olawe remains a *kapu* space not only by being off limits to unauthorized persons, but by the possible penalty of death for those who transgress the forbidden territory. At the same time, an interim report to the United States Congress by the Kaho'olawe Island Conveyance Commission (1991) demonstrated, through consolidated testimony at public hearings, that the island maintains spiritual as well as political and cultural significance for Hawaiians. This sacred status is strengthened by the mysterious deaths of two Hawaiian activists whose lives were sacrificed for this cause.

New American sacred sites came into being with a different bombardment: the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. These include sites of human sacrifice and "chiefly" burial: the *Arizona* Memorial and the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. Representing all of those who lost their lives in the attack on Pearl Harbor—drowned, burned, or blown up—the *Arizona* is both a tomb and a pilgrimage site, a national park and a

religious shrine. Statistics in 1980 ranked it as the most visited tourist site in the Hawaiian Islands, and it has been extensively analyzed by a number of papers, especially those written around the time of the 1991 fiftieth anniversary celebration, such as Turnbull (1993).

The second most visited site according to 1980 statistics is the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific. Unquestionably a sacred site, a locus of pilgrimage for millions of Americans, this cemetery is located in an extinct volcanic crater commonly known—since the earliest maps—as Punchbowl. The selection of this site is semiotically rich. A 1916 article in *Scientific Monthly* described it:

The Hawaiian name for this venerable crater is *Pu-o-Waina* and it has a tragic significance. The original form, from which the modern spelling is abbreviated, was *Puu o waiho ana*, literally the hill of offering or sacrifice. The people of primitive Hawaii were dominated by the dreadful *tabu* system that once ruled all Polynesia. The penalty for any violation of its intricate regulations was death. *Pu-o-waina* was one of the places near Honolulu where the bodies of the offenders were ceremoniously burned. Near the highest point on the seaward rim is a flat, altar-like ledge. (MacCaughy 1916, 609)

Atop this “Hill of Sacrifice” used by the “primitive” Hawaiians under their dreaded *kapu* system, a new set of bodies and a new altar were constructed. This symmetry was not lost in the patriotic fervor, but promoted and capitalized on in the literature on the cemetery. The one-page photocopied flier available from the cemetery office states in its first paragraph that, roughly translated, “‘Pūowaina’ means ‘Consecrated Hill’ or ‘Hill of Sacrifice.’ The Punchbowl was the site of many secret ‘alii’ (royal) burials. It was also the place where offenders of certain ‘*kapus*’ (taboos) were sacrificed.” Singletary’s treatment added “reverence to the highest degree” to the interpretations of Pūowaina and commented that whatever may be the correct translation, everyone agreed it was a place of human sacrifice (1977). Naming his treatise *Hill of Sacrifice*, Carlson pressed the association even further, going so far as to recreate an imaginary scenario of Hawaiian priests sacrificing *kapu*-breakers (1982).

The irony of the US military appropriation of Pūowaina for burying the bodies of the new *ali‘i* has even greater historical significance. Here it was, perhaps three centuries earlier, that a new practice of human sacrifice hitherto limited to Kaua‘i—involving drowning and burning of victims—was introduced to O‘ahu. Now a new religious element of

human sacrifice overlies this landscape with the annual Easter celebration in the crater. Easter being the celebration of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, a huge cross is erected on the crater summit. Promotional literature emphasizes this new spiritual aspect to this sacred space, using dramatic photos of the Easter celebration to add more symbolic holiness to this burial ground of the military. Through this ritual transformation of the landscape into a Christian space celebrating sacrifice, death, burial, and resurrection—the very core incident in Christianity—the gap is bridged between this site as a Hawaiian sacred space and as a Christian sacred space. Being a national cemetery further renders it a national sacred space and burial ground for bodies sacrificed defending the new moral and political order—the American Way.

The message of sacredness confronts a visitor on the way into the cemetery itself, where a different kind of *kapu* stick is placed. The white sign on posts by the gate declares “We welcome you to these hallowed grounds. To preserve the dignity, beauty, and serenity of this National Shrine, we ask you to observe our prohibited activities.” Among the extensive list of prohibited activities are such things as “boisterous actions—disrespectful conduct.” Violators will be prosecuted: “Disregard for the above prohibited activities may result in expulsion from the National Cemetery and/or prosecution by authority of title 38, U.S. Code Section 218 and/or under applicable provisions of the State of Hawaii penal code.”

Before one even steps onto the grounds, then, law and punishment regarding this sacred space are presented. This place is truly *kapu*. The coalescence of public or national space with religious space exemplified here is further captured by the state's desecration law:

- (1) A person commits the offense of desecration if he intentionally desecrates:
 - (a) Any public monument or structure; or
 - (b) A place of worship or burial; or
 - (c) In a public place the national flag or any other object of veneration by a sufficient segment of the public.
- (2) “Desecrate” means defacing, damaging, polluting, or otherwise physically mistreating in a way that the defendant knows will outrage the sensibilities of persons likely to observe or discover his action. (Hawai'i Revised Statutes 1991, Section 711-1107).

The cemetery itself is a sweep of neatly kept grass and spreading algaroba trees. Headstones are sunk flush with the ground in a park-like



FIGURE 8. Easter sunrise service at Punchbowl. This photograph was used in Carlson (1982), and a similar one used in Singletary (1977). (*Courtesy of Bishop Museum*)

vista, such that the layout of roads and flagpoles draws the eye toward the white temple-like structure at the far end. Here wide steps lead up past “Courts of the missing”—galleries where names of US servicemen, missing in action from wars in Asia and the Pacific, are chiseled into stone. At the top of these stairs a wide court opens out and one stands beneath the fearful gaze of an enormous idol: Columbia. Much as the Hawaiians laid their sacrifices at the feet of such idols, below the feet of this one are large stone letters that read:

The Solemn Pride
That Must Be Yours
To Have Laid
So Costly A Sacrifice
Upon The Altar
Of Freedom

A semicircular arcade forming the back of this court holds large mosaics representing stages of the war in the Pacific, with battleships, aircraft, and troop movements signified by icons and arrows. At the end of the arcade is a “nondenominational” chapel.

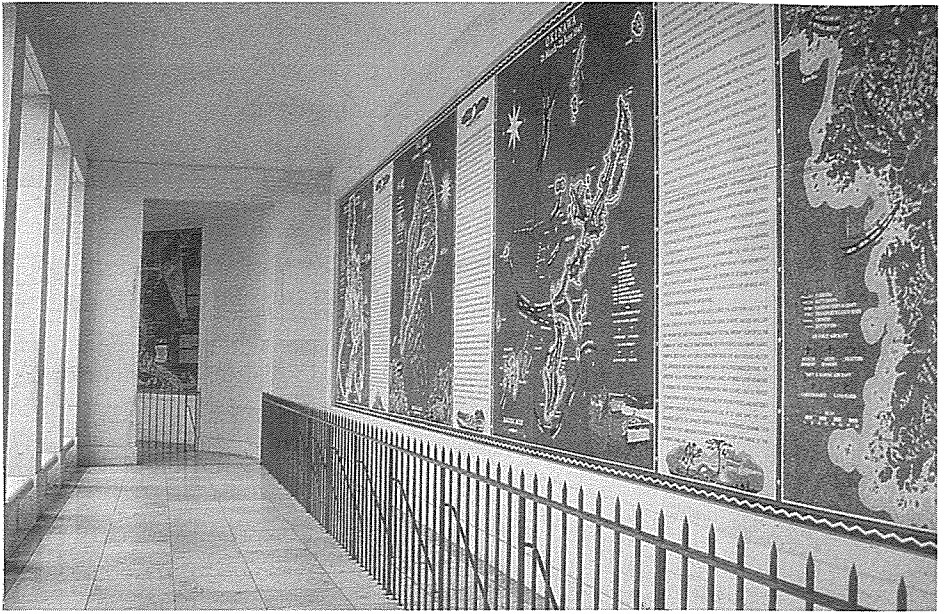


FIGURE 9. Battle-plan mosaics behind a spiked fence surround the statue of Columbia in an arcade that includes a “nondenominational chapel.”

This semiotic mix of sacrificial altar and courts of the dead with full-color battle diagrams and national idolatry, must truly rustle the feathers of Kūkā‘ilimoku, the Hawaiian war-god idol of Kamehameha, who sits in a glass case at the Bishop Museum, banished from any sacred status along with the *kapu* system and Hawaiian sovereignty.

EPILOGUE

On a cool December night I stood outside the gates of ‘Iolani Palace. Next door at Honolulu Hale, the building housing the government of Honolulu, large plastic snowmen and elves were lit up along with Christmas trees as part of the annual Christmas light fest. Turning my gaze from that bustling site where Christian idolatry and civil government reified each other, I looked up through closed gates to the dark windows of the palace. Now virtually a museum, with the government moved to newer, larger buildings, the palace stands silent sentinel to the loss of sovereignty. A year or so after I stood there, Hawaiian activists would be arrested staging a prosovereignty protest, and would cling to its garish columns,



FIGURE 10. The idol atop the *heiau*? Columbia with olive branch, riding on the bow of a battleship over Lincoln's praise for laying a sacrifice on the altar of freedom.

claiming this was sacred ground for Hawaiians, before policemen would pull them off and drag them away. A year or so after that, the palace would be draped in black as the Hawaiian nation celebrated and mourned the overthrow of the last monarch. And a year later still, the palace grounds would be the site of several podiums at which countless Hawaiians would speak for two days in a festival on Hawaiian sovereignty, demonstrating both the enormity and the plurality of Hawaiian resistance to American rule.

An *ahu* or altar built during the 1993 celebration stands in the corner of the grounds, near the former tomb of Kamehameha the Second and his wife, Kamāmalu. This unmortared lava-rock monument, adorned with leis, stands in contrast to other structures on the grounds, like the colonial-design bandstand and the cast-iron fence of the old burial site, both with signs declaring them *kapu*.

In the 1993 Kamehameha Day Parade, a flotilla of red convertibles (red, the royal color of the Hawaiians) bearing the governor, the mayor, and other political notables, had Governor Waihe'e's car marked with a sign designating him not governor, but "*ali'i*." An ambiguous bridging of that gap between ancient hierarchy and modern American politics, this sign on the one hand signified a reversal of the appropriation—that having this Hawaiian as governor reinstates the true notion of *ali'i*—and on the other hand, cemented the appropriation into place by allocating this sign of divine-right-to-rule to the American civil governor.

Notes

1 The term *kapu*, found in various forms and with various culturally specific meanings throughout the Pacific, was quickly encompassed into a unitary western term and concept, *taboo*. That is, *taboo* is now an English word whose meanings are culturally specific within the anglophone context. This too is part of the appropriation of *kapu*.

2 Another level of *kapu* pertains to the ancestral deities (*'aumakua*), violations of which were punishable by sickness, accident, or misfortune. Though these are of no concern here, their presence was important, because the concept of *kapu* included more than just those laws imposed by the chiefs and priests. It operated on the level of personal and familial spirituality as well. See Kamakau (1964, 29); Handy and Pukui (1972, 38).

3 Pearson's (1969) discussion of similar events in Tahiti included the possible explanation that in Polynesia generally, a foreign vessel and its contents were considered "property" of the host island's gods, and were shared out among the chiefs. The voyager, if he wished to continue his journey, was eventually outfitted with a new canoe at the chiefs' expense. Reciprocity and exchange, Pearson argued, would have taken place in the long run for objects taken.

4 The complexity of Hawaiian reactions to Cook's death deserves consideration beyond the scope of this paper. Here I consider its meaning only within the *haole* discourse.

5 The footnote to La Pérouse's account explaining that *taboo* is "A word which, according to their religion, signifies a thing which may not be touched, or a consecrated place into which they are not permitted to enter" shows clearly that these western explorers were aware of the sacred connotation that *kapu* holds. See La Pérouse (1799, 342-343).

6 The discursive power of this appropriation is reflected in the journal of Byron's voyage (1826, 62), regarding King Liholiho's visit to England: "On reaching the steps of Henry the Seventh's chapel, and hearing that the ancient kings of England were buried there, they said it was too sacred, and no argument could prevail upon the king to enter it."

7 A report from the Sandwich Island Mission published in the *Missionary Herald* (September 1836, 358) stated "When a British officer demanded the murderers, the chief who was employed to search for them took up two men who had no concern with that affair, and brought them forward to be shot, and assisted in their execution, as he now confesses with grief."

8 The idea that a Christian *kapu* replaced the traditional Hawaiian *kapu* is not new here, but has been explicated by Daws (1968) and by Sahlins in a series of lectures given at the 13th International Summer Institute for Semiotic and Structural Studies held at the University of Hawai'i in 1991.

9 The first printed laws pertained to foreign seamen found "disturbing the peace" and the punishments therefor ("Printed Laws in 1822" *The Friend*, September 1922, 197). Lord Byron is often credited with introducing the first laws to the islands, though these were no more than suggestions given in a prepared speech by him before the council of chiefs in June 1825. Aside from port regulations, these "suggestions" constituted a civil code to ensure some individual and property rights (Westervelt 1909, 42-43). Of course, such statements as "Byron introduced the first laws" contributed to the notion that the Hawaiians had no laws, or that being Hawaiian, such codes did not constitute "real" laws.

10 Compare the land ownership map from the *Atlas of Hawaii* (Armstrong 1982) to the Kamehameha Schools' (1987) map of pre-*maha*le land boundaries.

11 Taking care of Native Hawaiians was far from the primary ambitions of the United States Government. Indeed, Native Hawaiians need not be recognized

at all—and still are not, for the most part—as being a dispossessed native people. From the US Government standpoint, the islands were annexed in treaty with the Republican Government, not with the Native Hawaiians. Unlike other “Indian” nations, the Hawaiians lack treaty status and are allowed no special rights. Even the Hawaiian Homestead Act is debated as unconstitutional—consisting of racial bias favoring one particular ethnic minority.

12 *The Hawaiian Homes Commission Act*, 1920, Chapter 42 (as amended to and including April 1, 1964), Section 203 excludes all cultivated sugarcane lands from the designation of “available lands” for Hawaiian Homesteads. The Act refers to public lands leased by the plantations, not private lands.

13 Armed Services’ Land “Grabs” Hit by Home Owners. *Honolulu Advertiser*, 18 August 1946.

14 Navy Land Condemning Tactics Hit By Owners. *Honolulu Advertiser*, 20 August 1946.

15 Historian O A Bushnell, personal communication to Phyllis Turnbull.

16 It may be argued that martial law is a special case, not representative of the military and federal government’s power to impose *kapu* over land, resources, and behavior. But it is exactly the ability of the government to do this, or to violate any civil rights or property rights in the name of “national security,” that distinguishes the government or military as a “class” apart from “citizens” or “civilians.” When these “security reasons” turn out to provide officers’ clubs and vacation cottages for military personnel, one must question the extent to which this ability to seize property differs qualitatively from the similar power allegedly held by the Hawaiian *ali‘i*.

17 The desecration of *heiau* by Hawaiians in 1820 had already been followed through with gusto by haoles—from the symbolic building of churches on *heiau* sites, or with the use of stones from a *heiau* to symbolize the triumph of Christianity over the heathen forces of darkness, to a range of far more secular and economic uses such as cattle pens, dams, fences, walls, or to supply rock crushers.

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Abstract

Three events literally put the Hawaiian Islands on the map: the death of Captain Cook, the overthrow of the *kapu* system, and the bombing of Pearl Harbor. These events are also signposts in a circular movement of power out of the hands of Hawaiians and into the hands of Euro-Americans. Starting with the bombing of Kealakekua Bay by Cook's ships and culminating in US martial law over the islands after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the power to proclaim *kapu* shifted from the Hawaiian *ali'i* to a new "*ali'i*" composed of the US government and its military. The use of symbolic landscapes to reify power similarly moved from Hawaiian *heiau* to American war memorials. Using the word and concept of *kapu* (taboo) as a trail marker, this change in politic is re-read to reveal the western appropriation of an "oppressive" power once allegedly held, in western discourse, by the Hawaiian *ali'i*. This very allegation at once justifies and mystifies the shift of power into western hands.

KEYWORDS: *kapu* (taboo), Hawai'i, *ali'i*, law, human sacrifice, discourse, landscape