

## **Hawaiian Sovereignty**

By Joseph Riedel

The sovereign nation of Hawai'i, which existed for centuries under the rule of a monarchy which was, by all indications peaceful, under which its people did not suffer oppression or poverty, was overthrown by the United States on January 17, 1893, and later annexed by the United States in 1898. The vast majority of Native Hawaiians at the time, as well as in present time, view the annexation of their islands as an illegal overthrow, and as a result, the same percentage of Native Hawaiians, although less in number than a century ago, still support the return of sovereignty to Hawai'i. The movement continues today due to the commitment of the indigenous people of Hawai'i to preserve their culture, as well as their desire to return to the *Ka Ea O Ka 'Aina*, which, when interpreted, means: Life of the Land.<sup>1</sup> Roadblocks have littered the path to sovereignty for Native Hawaiians, but proponents of sovereignty may have the tools needed to clear them.

Over the last one hundred nine years since the annexation of Hawaii, the *Kanaka Hawai'i*, or Hawaiian Citizens have witnessed a significant loss of native culture, due in part to increased intermarriages between Native Hawaiians and other ethnicities, as well each generation taking on more of American culture. Native Hawaiians represent sixty percent of the homeless population in Hawai'i. They also have higher unemployment rates than other ethnicities<sup>2</sup>. Many different factors have shaped the transition from a sovereign nation resisting imperialism, to an occupied nation, to statehood, and now to the struggle to regain sovereignty, involving different characters spearheading each individual movement, usually on different fronts.

Queen Lili'uokalani, who became the last monarch to rule Hawai'i, led the resistance of imperialism. In January of 1893, Queen Lili'uokalani attempted to dissolve the Bayonet Constitution. The Bayonet Constitution, signed by King Kalakaua in 1887, had significantly diminished the power that Native Hawaiians held over their own country.<sup>3</sup> It was this attempt to restore power to Native Hawaiians that the Committee of Safety, a group formed with the intention of forming a provisional government, decided to use in order to achieve their goal.<sup>4</sup> The group deceived the United States Minister into believing that they were in danger. As a result, the United States Marines were sent ashore, and the next day, a provisional government was established, comprised of several of the members of the Committee of Safety.

President Grover Cleveland rescinded the treaty for annexation when he realized the manner in which the provisional government was established, saying, "By an act of war committed with the participation of a diplomatic representative of the United States and without authority of Congress, the Government of a feeble but friendly and confiding people have been overthrown."<sup>5</sup> After he acknowledged the illegitimacy of the invasion and overthrow of the Hawaiian government, Cleveland went even further, proclaiming, "A substantial wrong has thus been done which a due regard for our national character as well as the rights of the injured people required we should endeavor to repair."<sup>6</sup> While President Cleveland did not re-submit the annexation treaty, he did not officially disassemble the provision government, or reinstate the Hawaiian Monarchy.

After the provisional government renamed itself the Republic of Hawai'i, they set up an oligarchic system of governance, which author Haunani-Kay Trask describes as one "With a franchise limited by property and language requirements and a loyalty oath that effectively excluded all natives."<sup>7</sup> Due to the provisional government remaining in control of Hawai'i, and

their inability to participate in their own governance, Queen Lili'uokalani and her supporters continued to resist the occupation of the government that they believed to be illegitimate. This continued until the American-backed Republic of Hawai'i had her arrested for supporting an attempt to reassert her rule in 1895<sup>8</sup>, forced her to officially abdicate her throne, and imprisoned her for five months. The imprisonment by Queen Lili'uokalani was a crushing blow to the Hawaiian people. After the loss of the Queen, who was the clear leader of the movement to regain their sovereignty, the provisional government moved even further to asseverate their rule over the Hawaiian people. In 1896, they declared English as the only official language, closing all schools that taught the Hawaiian language in a move to insure that future generations would have greater attachment to American ideals, and less to the native culture of their parents.

The debate over the annexation of Hawai'i remained at a stalemate until William McKinley assumed the presidency in 1897.<sup>9</sup> There had been no vote on the official annexation of Hawai'i during the Cleveland Administration due to a few different factors, both in Washington, DC, as well as in Hawai'i. The leaders of the provisional government knew that if they allowed the people of Hawai'i to vote on annexation, they would overwhelmingly reject it given the nature through which the Republic of Hawai'i came into existence. Thus, due to the bountiful level of 'antidisestablishmentarianism' in the provisional government, The Hawaiian people were never granted a vote on the topic of annexation by the United States. In Washington, Congress never voted on the annexation of Hawai'i. This was mostly due to the lack of desire among members of Congress to admit a nation of dark-skinned people into a white nation.

When America found itself at war with Spain in 1898, Congress accepted the proposal of annexation at the urging of John Schofield<sup>10</sup>, an army officer who argued that the Spanish might

take over Hawai'i and use it as a base for military operations in the Pacific. Accepting this advice, Congress voted in favor of annexation, despite the fact that Queen Lili'uokalani presented a petition with the signatures of over twenty-nine thousand Native Hawaiians. On August 12, 1898, The United States formally declared Hawai'i as one of its territories, in a ceremony at 'Iolani Palace in Honolulu. In the hearts and minds of many Hawaiians, they had lost their identity.

The period from annexation at the end of the Eighteenth Century as a territory until its statehood in 1949 was one of Americanization for Hawai'i. The movement for sovereignty was largely silent as the percentage of Native Hawaiians in relation to the population of Hawai'i significantly dropped after annexation, due to colonization. On July 9, 1921, Congress passed the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, which set aside 200,000 acres of land in the Hawaiian Islands for homesteading by Native Hawaiians<sup>11</sup>. This proved to be ineffective, as most of the Native Hawaiians eventually rented their homesteads to corporations, which was the opposite of the intended result of the bill.

With the entrance of Hawai'i as the fiftieth state of America on August 21, 1959, a vote that did not include the option of sovereignty, it appeared that the movement for Hawaiian independence was all but over. A resurgence of the desire for sovereignty by Native Hawaiians, predominately by students in the 1970's would demonstrate that this was not the case. Younger leaders like Hanale "Soli" Niheu emerged and led a new wave of the Hawaiian Sovereignty movement, which centered on protection of Native Hawaiian rights. The Kalama Valley Struggle became the event that galvanized the movement in the 1970's, when the Kamehameha Schools Bishop Estate began to evict local Native Hawaiian Farmers to make room for a subdivision that local developer Stanford Carr, had been planning<sup>12</sup>. It was with this struggle

that the modern sovereignty movement was born. With its birth, it resurrected the struggle of Queen Lili'uokalani, started eighty years before.

The modern sovereignty movement has been effective, in part, due to the support of their Legislators, Senator Daniel Kahikina Akaka, and Senator Daniel Inouye. On November 23, 1993, a Senate Joint Resolution<sup>13</sup> that Senator Daniel Akaka introduced on February 6, 1991, was signed by President Bill Clinton and called United States Public Law 103-150<sup>14</sup>; it issued an official apology on the one hundredth anniversary of the overthrow of Queen Lili'uokalani, and the sovereign Hawaiian government.

The sovereignty movement has allies in the form of both of their Representatives in the United States Senate, Daniel Kahikina Akaka, and Daniel Inouye. Senator Akaka, who is a Native Hawaiian, has introduced several bills, repeatedly calling for the establishment of some form of sovereignty for Native Hawaiians, similar to the way that the United States recognizes Native American Tribes as sovereign nations. The attempts by Senator Akaka, which his colleague in the United States Senate, Senator Inouye, supports, are not met with overwhelming support. The Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act of 2007, or the Akaka Bill, as the local residents in Hawai'i refer to it, has opposition from conservatives in Congress, as well as by some sovereignty supporters in Hawai'i. Conservatives who oppose the legislation do so because they believe it will set a precedent for other ethnic groups who may want to form their own race-based nation. This argument is a weak one, when you consider the fact that Hawai'i was already a sovereign nation. Sovereignty groups in Hawai'i oppose the bill because it makes them a nation within a nation, whereas they want their independence returned to them.

Pu'uhoonua "Bumpy" Kanahale, the current Head of State of the Independent and Sovereign National State of Hawai'i, when his thoughts on the bill, replied: "This is a second attempt at

annexation, as good as it sounds.<sup>15</sup> Despite the opposition, The United States House of Representatives passed Senator Akaka's Bill on October 24, 2007, by a vote of 261 to 153<sup>16</sup>. While Senator Akaka enacts change through the legislative process, others, such as Pu'uhonua "Bumpy" Kanahele, shepherd the sovereignty movement by returning to *Ka Ea O Ka 'Aina*, living life in the manner of their forefathers. Kanahele, who is a descendant of King Kamehameha the Great, was the figure that drove the movement that led to the establishment of Pu'uhonua o Waimanalo, a forty-five acre settlement where native Hawaiians are returning to the Kanaka Moali way of communal living.<sup>17</sup>

With the passage of the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act of 2007, the debate switches to whether or not the Native Hawaiians can transition into a functioning government with the ability to retain its sovereignty. One of the issues any new Hawaiian state will have to confront is resolving the return to the communal style of life that many Native Hawaiians desire with the realities of an Increasing Scale, explained by Samuel Beer in his article, *Dynamics of Modernization*<sup>18</sup>. Hawai'i has been exposed to a much larger scale of influence than their sovereign government. Because of this, they will have to create a balance between their desire for communal style of living, which does not rely on currency and accumulation of wealth, and the relationships with other nation states that do. Even if a hypothetical new Hawaiian government could establish a method in which they can do business with other states, and still maintain their system that does not rely upon currency, it would still depend on the willingness of their citizens to accept it. In addition to this, any form of Hawaiian sovereignty will have to examine whether or not a full return to the way of life their forefathers knew is even possible. Many would view a return to the *Ka Ea O Ka 'Aina* would be a step back on the path to governmental development, an idea proposed by Francis Fukuyama in his article,

*The End of History?* In his article, Fukuyama suggests that nations without a Liberal Democracy form of government are less developed<sup>19</sup>. While the accuracy of Fukuyama's theory is widely debated, it brings to light an important observation as to the perception nation states around the world would have of a new Hawaiian state that will appear in the eyes of many to have taken a step backwards on the journey to modernization.

Since the rebirth of the Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement a few decades ago, many of the unachieved goals of Queen Lili'uokalani and her supporters have been attained through legislative means, as well as grassroots organization. On the legislative front, President Clinton issued an official apology in 1993, acknowledging the illegal overthrow of the sovereign nation of Hawai'i. More recently, the United States House of Representatives passed the Native Hawaiian Government Reorganization Act of 2007 on October 24, 2007. On the grassroots level, Pu'uuhonua "Bumpy" Kanahela, an activist and leader of the sovereignty movement in Hawai'i, negotiated the settlement of Pu'uuhonua o Waimanalo, which is sure to become the focal point of any new Hawaiian state that is established in the near future. With the roadblocks seemingly removed from the path to sovereignty, the outlook for proponents of a sovereign Hawai'i appears to be positive. Only the passage of time will tell whether the Native Hawaiians will be able to cast off the bitterness of a century of occupation and proceed with optimism towards the independent future they have sought after so dearly.

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<sup>2</sup> North, Andrew. "Revolution in Hawaii." Geographical 66 (1994): 6. EBSCO. American University Library, Washington, DC. 24 Oct. 2007 <<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=3&hid=12&sid=bebe1803-efd1-49d7-a052-81f641ba151c%40sessionmgr8>>.

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- <sup>3</sup> "Kingdom of Hawaii Constitution of 1887." Hawaii - Independent & Sovereign. 24 Oct. 2007 <<http://www.hawaii-nation.org/constitution-1887.html>>.
- <sup>4</sup> Spickard, Paul, Joanne L. Rondilla, and Debbie H. Wright, Eds. Pacific Diaspora. Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawai'i P, 2002. 317.
- <sup>5</sup> Cleveland, Grover. "Message to Congress" 18 Dec. 1893.
- <sup>6</sup> Cleveland, Grover. "Message to Congress" 18 Dec. 1893.
- <sup>7</sup> Trask, Haunani-Kay. From a Native Daughter. Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii P, 1999. 15.
- <sup>8</sup> Trask, Haunani-Kay. From a Native Daughter. Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii P, 1999. 15.
- <sup>9</sup> "Biography of William McKinley." The White House. The United States of America. 24 Oct. 2007 <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/wm25.html>>.
- <sup>10</sup> Coffman, Tom. The Island Edge of America. Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii P, 2003. 8.
- <sup>11</sup> Kuhio Kalaniana'ole, Jonah. "Hawaiian Homes Commission Act." Hawaii - Independent & Sovereign. United States House of Representatives. 24 Oct. 2007 <<http://www.hawaii-nation.org/hhca.html>>.
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- <sup>14</sup> Akaka, Daniel K. "Daniel Kahikini Akaka, U.S. Senator of Hawaii: Statements and Speeches." Unites States Senate. Unites States Senate. 24 Oct. 2007 <[http://akaka.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Speeches.Home&month=1&year=2007&release\\_id](http://akaka.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=Speeches.Home&month=1&year=2007&release_id)>.
- <sup>15</sup> Pang, Gordon. "Hawaiian Independence Groups Send 'No' Message." The Honolulu Advertiser 1 July 2005. 24 Oct. 2007 <<http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2005/Jul/01/ln/ln15p.html/?print=on>>.
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