
Emerging Nations, Emerging Empires

Inter-Imperial Intimacies and Competing Settler Colonialisms in Hawai'i

ABSTRACT This article covers the controversy that followed the March 16, 1893 escape of prisoner Yosaku Imada to the Japanese warship, the *Naniwa*, which was docked in Honolulu. Imada's act of seeking refuge onboard the ship occurred at a time when the provisional government of Hawai'i had no extradition treaty with Japan. This created a diplomatic event that entangled leaders from Japan, the provisional government, and the United States. To further complicate matters, Issei and Meiji government officials were also pressing for franchise in the Islands, a right that a majority of the community did not have access to at home. By placing Imada's escape and the Issei fight for voting rights in the context of the uncertainty that followed the January 17, 1893 overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, this article emphasizes Hawai'i's relevance as a site where inter-imperial dynamics aligned with competing settler colonialisms. **KEYWORDS** inter-imperial, nineteenth century, Hawai'i, transpacific, empire, settler colonialism, Yosaku Imada

When Yosaku Imada escaped from the reef-based quarantine station on O'ahu, Hawai'i by jumping into the Pacific Ocean, he did not intend to cause a diplomatic event. He had been imprisoned in O'ahu Jail from late 1892 after being found guilty of second-degree murder for killing fellow Issei (first-generation immigrant) contract laborer, "Kanazawa," with a hatchet on Waihe'e, Maui.¹ As Imada swam toward the *Naniwa*, the Japanese warship anchored offshore, he was just trying to escape his prison sentence of twenty-one years hard labor. But his March 16, 1893 early morning escape made headlines in both Hawai'i and Japan.

That afternoon Sanford Dole, who was soon to become the first and only president of the provisional government, wrote to Japan's Consul General in Hawai'i, Saburo Fujii, requesting the return of the escapee. Fujii responded

1. Court records give no further information of the victim other than to refer to him as a worker named "Kanazawa, a Jap." Imada had reportedly returned home to find his wife in bed with "Kanazawa" and proceeded to attack him. *Queen v. Yosaku* (Second Judicial Circuit Court 1892).



FIGURE 1. Issei landing at Honolulu Harbor, 1893. *Courtesy of Hawai'i State Archives, Hadley Collection, gift of Mrs. V. Larsen, 1972.*

that the matter was beyond his authority and he would instead keep Imada on the *Naniwa* until he received further direction from his home government.² Later that day, the provisional government placed all remaining Japanese prisoners under strict observation and removed them from work detail on the reef.

Coming just two months after the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy by the kingdom's powerful haole (white, foreign) American and European elite class, the newly formed "provisional" coup government of Hawai'i faced one of its first diplomatic entanglements. Although Imada was convicted under the Hawaiian Kingdom's judicial system, by the time he swam for his freedom, the monarchy had been overthrown. Had the *Naniwa* been a merchant ship it would have been subject to the coup government's authority. As a vessel of war however, it carried its national sovereignty on board. At the time of Imada's escape, the two-month old provisional government had no extradition treaty with Japan. Over the next month, leaders of the coup government, Japan, and the United States monitored the case. Unfortunately for Imada,

2. Saburo Fujii to Dole, 16 March 1893, Honolulu (Hawai'i), series 403, fol. 259, Records of the Foreign Office and Executive, Foreign Officials in Hawai'i, Hawai'i State Archives, Honolulu, Hi.

the diplomatic parties involved were not invested in him, as he was a person of no social or economic consequence. But his act of seeking refuge onboard a Japanese warship at this specific time and place forced competing political powers to grapple with complex questions of race-based citizenship and state jurisdiction.

To further complicate matters, while the question of Imada's return to the provisional government was being negotiated, Hawai'i-based Issei and Meiji government officials were pressing for voting rights in the archipelago, a right that a majority of the island-based community would not have had access to in Japan.³ Consequently, the impact of Imada's escape was magnified in light of the Issei effort to gain voting rights. Imperialists and leaders of the provisional government whose goal was annexation to the United States used the combined threat of possible Issei franchise and Meiji involvement in the Imada case as proof of the Japanese "menace" in Hawai'i. Although much has been written about the power of the Meiji state in fostering the differential treatment of Issei as opposed to other Asian immigrants, in 1893 Japan had not yet emerged as an imperial power outside of Asia.⁴

While Japan, the United States, and the provisional government were embroiled in the battle over Imada and voting rights for Issei, Kānaka Maoli (Native Hawaiians) were actively engaged in restoring power to their kingdom.⁵ Among the many tactics that they used was the appeal to international law and Western definitions of state-based sovereignty. Immediately following the overthrow, the po'e aloha 'āina (Native Hawaiians working to maintain their political independence) formed the Hui Hawai'i Aloha 'Āina (Hawaiian Patriotic League) and sister organization, Hui Hawai'i Aloha 'Āina o Nā Wāhine.⁶ Together these groups and Hui Kālāi'āina (Hawaiian

3. According to the Meiji Constitution, members of the House of Representatives were elected by direct male suffrage with qualifications based on taxes. In general, voting was a right limited to the upper class. Universal adult male suffrage was introduced in 1925.

4. By 1893, Japan had colonized Hokkaido (1869) and invaded Taiwan in order to enforce claims on the Ryukyu Islands, formally annexing them in 1879 as Okinawa prefecture. For more information on the Hawai'i-based anti-Japanese sentiment, refer to Moon-Kie Jung, *Reworking Race: The Making of Hawaii's Interracial Labor Movement*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006) and Gary Y. Okihiro, *Cane Fires: The Anti-Japanese Movement in Hawaii, 1865-1945* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

5. For example, in July 1889, Robert Kalanihiapo Wilcox and eighty other men took part in Kāu Kūloko, or Civil War. In order to ground the analysis in Hawai'i, this article includes the work of those who have analyzed this counter-revolution, including Lili'uokalani, *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen* (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc., 1964) and Noenoe K. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

6. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed*, 130.

Political Association) organized in a recognizable “Euro-American tradition” and adopted the structural forms of the Western political system in order to dialogue with it.⁷ They created protest documents in Hawaiian as well as in English, a practice that further disproved the haole oligarchy’s claim to moral action based on the “uncivilized” nature of Indigenous rule. Along with Queen Lili‘uokalani’s protests, the members of the patriotic leagues presented their written objections to U.S. Commissioner James Blount and requested President Grover Cleveland’s assistance in the restoration of the monarchy.

For those living in late nineteenth-century Hawai‘i, the world was in flux. Their attempts to make sense out of this moment of instability are often overlooked by scholars of U.S. empire and historians who cover the provisional government and “republic” period. But reading the state-based diplomatic record in the context of the actions taken by haole and Meiji oligarchs, Hawaiian royalists, and local Issei alike, demonstrates that during this time the archipelago emerged as a “contested space of modernity,” and was not allowed to “remain ‘Hawaiian’” but rather, inscribed as “Pacific” and “American,” as well as “potentially Asian.”⁸ Unfortunately, for those fighting to restore the Hawaiian Kingdom, the political negotiations between the U.S.-backed coup state and Japan worked to mutually reinforce each other’s status as emerging imperial powers. Through this process, the inter-imperial intimacies between the United States and Japan obfuscated Indigenous claims to state-based sovereignty and mapped the Hawaiian archipelago onto their respective colonial imaginations.

By placing Imada’s escape and the Issei fight for franchise in the context of the uncertainty that followed the coup, this article emphasizes Hawai‘i’s relevance as a site where inter-imperial dynamics aligned with competing settler colonialisms.⁹ At the same time, it also considers how Indigenous articulations of state-based sovereignty and reactions against it were crucial

7. Hui Kālai‘āina was formed in 1887 in order to restore the Hawaiian Kingdom’s Constitution of 1864.

8. The two events covered in this article illuminate the new relationship between global and national space as it formed in Hawai‘i. See Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 24, 54.

9. Augusto Espiritu challenges scholars to reframe the narrative of Asian American history by using the “inter-imperial” perspective, or the “relations of cooperation, competition, and conflict between empires.” Using this framework to analyze seemingly local events situates empire and nation-state within a global-historical frame that works to reveal them as construction and process. See Augusto Espiritu, “Inter-imperial Relations, the Pacific, and Asian American History,” *Pacific Historical Review* 83, no. 2 (2014): 238–54.

to competing imperial projects in the archipelago. From this viewpoint, the white settler colonial project in Hawai'i is revealed to be tenuous at best.

That the debate over Issei voting rights and Imada's release happened in the politically ambiguous archipelago underscored questions about who held power in the region. Leaders in the United States understood that with over fifty years of interest vested in the Islands, the future of Hawai'i was of great strategic importance to an "American Pacific." Consequently, the *USS Boston*, one of the U.S. Navy's newest warships, remained docked in Honolulu Harbor while its troops drilled on shore. At the same time, Hawaiians were purposefully constructing arguments that incorporated Western understandings of state-centric sovereignty to actively promote their political independence. Members of the Japan-based expansionist political factions, the Association of Politics and Education (Seikyōsha) and Liberal Party (Jiyū-tō), and their like-minded compatriots of the San Francisco-based Japanese Patriotic League (Sōkō Nihonjin Aikoku Dōmei) and Expedition Society (Enseisha), expounded on Japan's "colonial destiny" and lobbied for "popular political control through democratic means" in Hawai'i—namely securing the right of franchise.¹⁰ These men also viewed negotiating for the right to protect the escaped prisoner and securing voting rights for their emigrant population as opportunities to seek recognition on equal footing with Western powers.

When compared to the overthrow, the case of an escaped Japanese prisoner and the Issei movement for voting rights may seem like minor historical events. But positioning them within the transnational reality that faced those in Hawai'i reveals how seemingly inconsequential acts took on larger historical and political significance simply because of where and when they occurred. If the argument for Issei franchise had been made in the continental United States for example, the stakes would have been different, as legal

10. Established in 1888, Seikyōsha (Association of Politics and Education) called on the state to promote mass emigration and also advocated for a proactive imperialist policy. Founded in 1881, the first Liberal Party (Jiyū-tō) was Japan's first major political party under the parliamentary system. Although the party disbanded in 1884, their members joined with other Japanese nationalist groups, including the Seikyōsha, to agitate for open emigration, national expansion, and imperialism. Members of both groups could also be found in the continental United States. Enseisha was formed by exiled Freedom and People's Right's activists who resided in San Francisco. The core of the Japanese Patriotic League included over thirty political activists from the former Liberal Party. See Eiichiro Azuma, *In Search of Our Frontier: Japanese American and Settler Colonialism in the Construction of Japan's Borderless Empire*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019) 37–40; Sidney Xu Lu, *The Making of Japanese Settler Colonialism: Malthusianism and Trans-Pacific Migration 1868–1961*, 73.

restrictions aimed at Asian immigrants were already in place.¹¹ But as members of the haole elite called for annexation as a method of control over the “Japanese menace,” they also had to contend with the fact that Hawai‘i’s population comprised a majority non-white resident community, a large portion of which were also subjects of another developing empire and former subjects of the internationally recognized Hawaiian Kingdom.

CHANGING ARTICULATIONS OF CITIZENSHIP AND NATION IN HAWAI‘I

A conversation around articulations of nation and state jurisdiction in Hawai‘i cannot take place without engaging with Native land tenure policies. Navigating the intertwining histories of land loss and the path taken to access political power by the white American and European elite illuminates the importance of a Hawaiian concept of nationhood, as grounded in the relationship between land and people. Through altering the land tenure system of Hawai‘i and implementing a system of privatized land ownership, which in turn served as the requisite for suffrage in the coup state, haole elite influenced the ways in which both nation and state functioned in the archipelago.¹²

Hawaiian identity centers around ancestry, kinship, and genealogy.¹³ If the modern nation-state’s “ultimate defense is sovereignty—the nation’s self-proclaimed, absolute right to determine its own membership, a right believed to inhere in the nation-state’s very existence,” then in addition to kinship and genealogy, for Hawaiians the sovereign nation was linked to the communal care of land.¹⁴ As Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua explains, “ea refers to political independence and is often translated as ‘sovereignty.’ Unlike Euro-American

11. I refer here to the Naturalization Act of 1790.

12. See Jonathan Kamakawiwo‘ole Osorio, *Dismembering Lāhui: A History of the Hawaiian Nation to 1887* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002); and Sally Engle Merry, *Colonizing Hawai‘i: The Cultural Power of Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

13. The federal definition of “native Hawaiian” is a descendant with at least one-half blood quantum of individuals inhabiting the Hawaiian Islands prior to 1778. This is referred to as the 50 percent blood quantum rule. The State of Hawai‘i defines “Native Hawaiian” as anyone who can trace ancestry to the people who occupied the area that now comprises the state before 1778. J. Kēhaulani Kauanui effectively argues that “blood quantum is a manifestation of settler colonialism that works to deracinate . . . and displace indigenous peoples. . . . It is a colonial project in the service of land alienation and dispossession.” J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, *Hawaiian Blood: Colonialism and the Politics of Sovereignty and Indigeneity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

14. Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 11.

philosophical notions of sovereignty, ea is based on the experiences of people on the land, relationships forged through the process of remembering and caring for wahi pana, storied places.”¹⁵ Taking care of the land was necessary to maintain pono (balance) and rulers were charged with looking after the land for all.

Jonathan Kamakawiwo‘ole Osorio points out the need to deconstruct settler discourses which privilege European and American definitions of the nation-state in the current academic analysis of colonization.¹⁶ For Hawaiians, the concept of the nation and state is rooted in social, cultural, and political understandings of order under the aupuni system which requires the maintenance of pono between all things: Akua (gods), ali‘i (chiefs), maka‘āinana (commoners), and the ‘aina (land) itself.¹⁷ As Osorio explains, this idea of the nation-state is complicated because of the “various ways that we might define the word . . . For the haole that word can mean the country, its government, or the people it rules. But for Hawaiians, two words were necessary to convey the meaning of nationhood: aupuni, the government established by Kamehameha, and lāhui, which means gathering, community, tribe, and people.”¹⁸

In order to assert a nation-state that would enable Hawai‘i and Hawaiians to be seen as rightful rulers of themselves and engage strategically with the practices of the outside world, Hawaiian ali‘i often sought out knowledge of foreign nations. Beginning in the early 1840s ali‘i began to selectively appropriate the Euro-American concept of law in order to negotiate both the demands of foreign communities residing in Hawai‘i and encroaching colonial powers.¹⁹ In 1842 Kauikeaouli (King Kamehameha III) sent Timoteo

15. Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, “Introduction,” in *A Nation Rising: Hawaiian Movements for Life, Land, and Sovereignty*, eds., Noelani Goodyear-Ka‘ōpua, Ikaika Hussey, and Erin Kahuna-waika‘ala Wright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 4.

16. For more information on how Western understandings of the nation have influenced current decolonization movements, see Joanne Barker, ed., *Sovereignty Matters: Locations of Contestation and Possibility in Indigenous Struggles for Self-Determination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).

17. Osorio, *Dismembering Lāhui*. According to Osorio, pono referred to a “state of balance between numerous dualities,” especially in relation to a separation between male and female. For the maka‘āinana, the idea of pono linked them in a system of balance and responsibility to ali‘i and Akua. See also, Lilikalā Kame‘elehiwa, *Native Land and Foreign Desires: Paha E Pono Ai?* (Honolulu: Bishop Museum Press, 1992).

18. Osorio, *Dismembering Lāhui*, 40.

19. Between 1836 and 1839 Great Britain and France acquired special privileges for their subjects through a series of treaties. The Kumu Kānāwai, or the 1839 Declaration of Rights, the 1840 Constitution, and the laws of 1841 and 1842, joined together Hawaiian systems of governance with hints of Anglo-American inspiration and influence. Through her reading of Hawaiian language

Ha'alilio and William Richards, a former ABCFM (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) missionary turned adviser to the king, to meet with representatives from the United States, France, and Britain. Their goal was to gain recognition as a sovereign state and protect Hawai'i from colonization. This political strategy resulted in the November 28, 1843 acknowledgement of the Hawaiian Kingdom as a sovereign and independent state by both Great Britain and France.²⁰

Kauikeaouli also promulgated the nation's first constitution, which "asserted a Christian nation to protect the common people" and officially defined the terms of citizenship and naturalization.²¹ This document stated "those who were not born in the Islands, born to Natives living abroad, or born aboard a ship belonging to the Sandwich Islands were aliens unless they took the oath of allegiance to the mō'i (island ruler, in the monarchy era, monarch), thereby renouncing citizenship in their former country of origin."²² This naturalization procedure was also open to all Asians living in Hawai'i under the first two monarchical constitutions.²³ Under pressure from American and British business interests, the monarchy implemented an 1846 statute that recognized the category of "denizen," and allowed specially "favored aliens" to retain their foreign citizenship while also given access to the rights and privileges of Hawaiian citizens.

As white American and European elites increased their economic investment in Hawai'i, they intensified their efforts for the privatization of land and further inclusion in the government with little political or legal accountability. With the onset of the Māhele (land division) in 1848, land was made available for large-scale private ownership.²⁴ Access to land, however, was still

sources, Noelani Arista argues against the dominant missionary-driven narrative of changes to Hawaiian systems of law. While Kamanamaikalani Beamer takes a similar stance, he contends that ali'i created a hybrid government. See Noelani Arista, *The Kingdom and the Republic: Sovereign Hawai'i and the Early United States*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019); and Kamanamaikalani Beamer, *No Mākou Ka Mana: Liberating the Nation*. (Honolulu: Kamehameha Publishing, 2014).

20. The Hawaiian Kingdom was the first non-Western nation to be recognized as modern sovereign state. Although the United States claimed the Hawaiian Islands to be within its "sphere of influence," it recognized Hawai'i's independence with the Tyler Doctrine of 1842.

21. J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, *Paradoxes of Hawaiian Sovereignty*, 14 and Osorio, *Dismembering Lāhui*, 57.

22. Osorio, *Dismembering Lāhui*, 57.

23. These were the Constitutions of 1840 and 1852.

24. According to Beamer, private ownership of land did exist before the Māhele, but this was restricted to a "few select cases where an individual had acquired title through deed, oral or written, granted by either the mō'i or kuhina nui." Beamer, *No Mākou Ka Mana*, 142.

restricted by citizenship status. By 1850, restrictions on citizenship and other rights for foreigners had all but collapsed. In July of that year, all foreigners, including Asians, who were not naturalized, were granted the right to own and sell lands in fee.²⁵ Three weeks later the monarchy granted all men who were subjects of the Hawaiian Kingdom, native-born and naturalized, as well as denizens, the right to vote if they were “neither insane nor unpardoned felons.” They also had to be at least twenty years old and must have resided in the kingdom for at least a year.²⁶ By the end of July 1850, all men in Hawai‘i, regardless of race, were granted access to land and suffrage without giving up citizenship in their countries of origin or pledging allegiance to the Hawaiian monarch.

While the Māhele enabled broad ownership of land by Euro-Americans, it also contributed to the mass alienation of Hawaiians.²⁷ Without ownership of land, Hawaiians lost their political rights through the passage of the 1864 Constitution, which placed stringent property and literacy requirements on the franchise.²⁸ Under these laws the majority of Hawaiians were stripped of their voting rights and only a handful of Chinese immigrants met the property requirements necessary to command the right to vote.²⁹

The signing of the 1875 Reciprocity Treaty between Hawai‘i and the United States, an agreement that granted Hawaiian sugar duty-free access into U.S. markets, brought American sugar interests further into the kingdom’s political affairs. During his seventeen-year reign from 1874–1891, King David Kalākaua grew uneasy with the increasingly close ties between the United States and white American businessmen in Hawai‘i. As a form of resistance, he called for a rise in Indigenous leadership in the legislature, and

25. Due to their economic restrictions, land ownership by Asians was negligible.

26. Jon M. Van Dyke, *Who Owns the Crown Lands of Hawai‘i?* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2008), 142.

27. While a number of scholars have identified the Māhele as a form of capitalist exploitation that led to the alienation of maka‘āinana from the land, societal breakdown, and later colonization, others have argued for a more nuanced reading. This latter view frames the legislation as a strategy that was designed to empower Hawaiians through facilitating the transition from the land tenure system to one that would allow for capitalist development. See Ty Tengan, *Native Men Remade: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Hawai‘i* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Mark ‘Umi Perkins, “Kuleana: A Genealogy of Native Tenant Rights,” (PhD diss., University of Hawai‘i, 2013).

28. Article 62 of the Constitution required that voters own property of at least \$150, or a leasehold with rent of at least \$25/year, or to have an annual income of \$75/year. It also required that voters take a literacy test in either Hawaiian or English.

29. At this time, Chinese were the only sizeable Asian population in Hawai‘i. A majority of Chinese immigrants began coming to Hawai‘i in 1852 as contract laborers.

supported the revitalization of traditional Kanaka Maoli practices such as hula. He also sought support and legitimacy in the global arena. In 1881 Kalākaua embarked on a trip around the world, which brought him into contact with political leaders in East Asia and Oceania. Four years later, using the connections he had formed on his travels, Kalākaua attempted to establish a pan-Oceania and Asian polity as a way to harness the collective strength of the region and negotiate with Western colonial powers.

Despite Kalākaua's efforts and calls by the Hawaiian community for leadership to remain in Indigenous hands, American business opposition to the monarchy's control over the sugar industry grew. On July 6, 1887, members of the "Hawaiian League," a group of men which included Lorrin Thurston, a third-generation American missionary descendant, and Sanford Dole, held the king at gunpoint and forced him to sign a new constitution.³⁰ This document, known as the "Bayonet Constitution of 1887," stripped the monarchy of its political power, solidified an oligarchy made up of haole businessmen, and gave control of the military to the white American-dominated legislature.³¹

Besides adding racial restrictions, the constitution gave electoral rights to men who were residents, as opposed to citizen-subjects, of the kingdom.³² Electors of the House of Nobles were restricted to tax-paying males over the age of twenty of "Hawaiian, American, or European descent who had resided in the Islands for three years and could read and comprehend a newspaper written in 'Hawaiian, English, or some European language' and who met the 'stiff property qualification' of owning at least \$3,000 in taxable property or having an annual income of \$600/year."³³ In effect, the

30. The Hawaiian League was a secret organization composed of white Euro-American men. Their objective was to secure representative government in Hawai'i by any necessary means. The League's executive committee was known as the "Committee of Thirteen." U.S. Minister to Hawai'i Stevens renamed this group the "Committee of Safety" following the overthrow. Insiders referred to this group as the "Annexation Club." See Ralph S. Kuykendall, *Hawaiian Kingdom Volume III: 1874–1893 The Kalākaua Dynasty* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1967) and Osorio, *Dismembering Lāhui*.

31. Since the first Constitution of 1840, the king had appointed cabinet members, whose job it was to head government departments. Following the passing of the Bayonet Constitution of 1887, the cabinet could only be removed with a vote of want of confidence by the legislature, a group whose membership was dominated by white American planters.

32. Osorio writes that the Bayonet Constitution was the "first time that democratic rights were determined by race in any constitution." Osorio, *Dismembering Lāhui*, 244.

33. The category "European descent" was purposefully worded to allow for the inclusion of the Portuguese. In their attempt to alter the racial composition of Hawai'i, both Thurston and Dole would argue that Portuguese should be categorized as white.

new constitution gave U.S. citizens the right to vote in Hawaiian elections, while a large sector of the Indigenous electorate were excluded through rigorous property qualifications. Asians, who had formerly been included as citizens with the right to vote under the Hawaiian monarchy, were disenfranchised as “aliens.”³⁴ In other words, after 1887, even if a Japanese or Chinese man previously had the right to franchise, owned property, was naturalized or was born as a subject of the Hawaiian Kingdom, he would not have the right to vote. Justice Dole stated the situation succinctly when he explained in his 1892 Hawai‘i Supreme Court opinion in the matter of *Ahlo v. Smith*, that the 1887 Constitution “substituted the race requirement for the old condition of citizenship.”³⁵

When Kalākaua passed away in January 1891, the crown transferred to his sister, Lili‘uokalani. Members of the Hawaiian Patriotic Leagues launched a massive petition drive to convince the queen to promulgate a new constitution and secured the signatures of 6,500 registered voters—two thirds of the electorate. In response, Lili‘uokalani attempted to instate a new constitution that would restore the monarchy’s power by limiting suffrage to male subjects of the Hawaiian Kingdom, or those who had taken an oath of allegiance.³⁶ Leaders of the former Hawaiian League, now renamed the “Committee of Thirteen,” who included prominent American planters and merchants, understood that if the queen were to regain political power their economic investments in the islands would be at risk.³⁷ With the kingdom’s sugar industry already suffering from the McKinley Tariff of 1891, haole sugar interests decided to take matters into their own hands and instigated the coup.³⁸

34. Kauanui, *Hawaiian Blood*, 27; Donald Roland, “Orientals and the Suffrage in Hawai‘i,” *Pacific Historical Review* 12, no. 1 (1943): 13–14.

35. *Ahlo v. Smith*, 8 Haw. 420 (1892).

36. This would once again open up the right to vote to Asians who took the loyalty oath.

37. The “Committee of Thirteen” is thought to have comprised the following: Joseph B. Atherton, John H. Paty, William R. Castle, Peter C. Jones, Charles J. Austin, Benjamin F. Dillingham, Sanford B. Dole, Lorrin A. Thurston, William W. Hall, Henry F. Glade, Thomas May, William H. Bailey, and George N. Wilcox. Kuykendall, *Hawaiian Kingdom: 1874–1893*.

38. The McKinley Tariff took effect on April 1, 1891. It removed the tariff on all sugar entering the United States and granted a two-cent subsidy per pound to U.S. growers, thus nullifying the advantage that the Reciprocity Treaty gave Hawaiian sugar growers and limited the amount of sugar exported from the kingdom. For more information on the overthrow see Liliu‘okalani, *Hawai‘i’s Story by Hawai‘i’s Queen* (Mutual Publishing, 1991); Eric T. L. Love, *Race Over Empire: Racism and Imperialism 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Noenoe Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

On January 17, 1893, members of the Committee of Thirteen, most of whom were sugar plantation owners and the descendants of the first ABCFM members, along with the aid of the U.S. Marines and U.S. Minister to Hawai'i John L. Stevens, overthrew Lili'uokalani and established a provisional coup government.³⁹ The next day, the "revolutionaries," with the backing of the U.S. troops, took over the capital. That afternoon they announced the abrogation of the monarchy and the establishment of a provisional government until annexation by the United States could be negotiated.⁴⁰ Within an hour of the proclamation's reading, U.S. Minister Stevens recognized the government and extended official U.S. diplomatic recognition. Other nations, with the exception of Japan, did the same. Across the archipelago, po'e aloha 'aina immediately began organizing in protest.

A PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY

Questions concerning the extraterritorial reach of the developing U.S. and Meiji empires pushed political leaders in both countries to contemplate who could claim state protection; in the case of the United States, it also fortified Asian exclusion from the body politic. Grappling with how to incorporate populations who were not welcome in the U.S. national body but who were simultaneously ruled by the state, contributed to the rebuilding of a postbellum national identity. In other words, the annexation question pushed the white American populace not only to consider the incorporation of those outside of continental borders for the first time, but also to contemplate the specific possibility of allowing thousands of Asians and Hawaiians into the nation.⁴¹

Only twenty-eight years before Imada decided to jump into the Pacific Ocean, the United States had faced the possibility of collapse over questions

39. Stevens was known for his hostility toward the Hawaiian monarchy and his zealous support of annexation. During his four-year tenure in the Islands, he repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to intervene in the kingdom's activities through the use of the U.S. military. The fact that in January 1893 the USS *Boston*, the newest and most technologically advanced warship belonging to the United States, was docked in Honolulu, was not lost on the queen.

40. The Hawaiian Kingdom was familiar with foreign takeover attempts. In 1894 British naval officer George Paulet declared British rule over the Hawaiian archipelago. Sovereignty was restored to the Hawaiian Kingdom after five months. Based on prior history and experience, when faced with the coup, Lili'uokalani had reason to believe that she would be restored to power and her opposition punished.

41. Lauren L. Basson, "Fit for Annexation but Unfit to Vote?: Debating Hawaiian Suffrage Qualifications at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," *Social Science History* 29, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 576.

of race-based slavery, citizenship, and naturalization. Concern over the Islands' demography, and its possible impact on U.S. citizenry, had been loudly voiced in the debate over reciprocity with the Kingdom of Hawai'i in 1875 and again in 1887.⁴² In 1893 those who lived in the United States had to ask themselves what it meant politically, socially, and economically for their national identity if the empire were to incorporate overseas territories like Hawai'i and their resident "barbarian others."⁴³

The undeniable presence of Hawaiians, Asians, and particularly the Japanese, complicated the U.S. reaction to the possibility of Hawaiian annexation. A year before the overthrow, U.S. Minister Stevens predicted that tension would build in the archipelago from both sides of the Pacific. "Hawai'i," he wrote, "has reached the parting of the ways. She must now take the road which leads to Asia, or the other, which outlets her in America, gives her an American civilization and binds her to the care of American destiny."⁴⁴ In 1893, the ousted Lili'uokalani, members of the haole-led oligarchy, and U.S. and Meiji officials, found themselves asking the same question: What state apparatus would have control over Hawai'i?

When the Hawaiian League overthrew Lili'uokalani they had been under the impression that the United States would not hesitate to annex the archipelago. In May of the previous year, Thurston, leader of the League, traveled to Washington D.C. after attending a planning meeting for the upcoming 1893 Chicago's World Fair. His aim was to represent the then secret League and lobby for U.S. support. Although Thurston was denied an audience with Republican President Benjamin Harrison, the latter had authorized B.F. Tracy, Secretary of the Navy, to tell him that if he and his compatriots successfully organized a coup, he would find an "exceedingly sympathetic administration here."⁴⁵ Thurston left Washington thinking that

42. Under pressure from sugar interests, the Hawaiian Kingdom began negotiations with the United States regarding reciprocity in 1854 and was granted the trade relationship in 1876. Southern sugar interests were against treaties of reciprocity because it cut into their profit margins. For more detail regarding Congressional debates representing regional concerns, refer to 44 Cong. Rec. 1 Sess. 55565-5566 (1877).

43. Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).

44. John L. Stevens to John W. Foster, 20 Nov. 1892, Consular Letters, Records of the Department of State, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

45. Lorrin A. Thurston, *Memoirs of the Hawaiian Revolution* (Honolulu: The Honolulu Advertiser Publishing Company, 1936), 20.

he not only had the U.S. government's support, but that it would not hesitate to annex the island kingdom.

Immediately following the overthrow, Thurston traveled as part of a five-man commission to Washington that was tasked with securing a treaty of annexation to establish Hawai'i as a U.S. territory with all debts to be assumed by the federal government.⁴⁶ Coup government leaders understood that the demographic reality of Hawai'i precluded its admission as a state that allowed citizenship to all existing residents, as white men of any nationality were outnumbered ten to one by Hawaiians and Asians. They also recognized that they could not withhold citizenship from Hawaiians or those who had naturalized under the monarchy, as their claim to legitimacy rested on the "tyranny" of Native leadership. The delegates requested that the crown and government lands remain the property of the new territorial government, that the United States provide funding to improve Pearl Harbor and lay an oceanic cable that would connect the United States to the Islands, that Hawaiian sugar planters continue to receive the same bounty that American sugar growers were paid under the McKinley Tariff, and that the importation of Asian laborers into the islands continue without restriction.⁴⁷

Secretary of State John W. Foster was aware of the continued anxiety over Asian immigrants in the United States, as reflected by the recent renewal of the Chinese Exclusion Act. Therefore, when the commission arrived on February 3, he convinced them to create a document that would alleviate white labor's fear of further competition from Hawai'i's Asian population. The commission also abandoned their request to maintain importation of contract labor from Asia and added a special article that prohibited "all future immigration from East Asia into Hawai'i and from the islands into the United States."⁴⁸ This stipulation represented a promise that the "Chinese Exclusion Act would not be undermined, [and] that the domestic racial order would be unaffected by empire."⁴⁹ Together the group worked quickly to devise a treaty that Congress would ratify before President Harrison, who was defeated for re-election by Democrat Grover Cleveland, left office on March

46. Also on board was the queen's letter of protested surrender. Her delegation, however, would have to find other means of transportation, as the provisional government required the queen to secure and fund her own vessel.

47. *Proceedings on the Executive and Advisory Councils of the Provisional Government*, January 1893, 14–21, Hawai'i State Archives.

48. U.S. Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1894), 202–5; Love, *Race Over Empire*, 77.

49. Love, *Race Over Empire*, 78.

4, 1893.⁵⁰ Foster's treaty sailed through the Republican-controlled Committee on Foreign Relations and went to the full Senate on February 17, 1893, just one month after the coup. By this time, however, Queen Lili'uokalani's royal delegates, attorney Paul Neumann and Prince David Kawanakoa, had arrived in Washington and were busy making their case known.

Lili'uokalani's goal was to ensure that an investigation into the coup would occur before the annexation treaty was ratified by the Senate.⁵¹ To this effect, her protest letter sent to President Harrison purposefully constructed an argument that called on Western frames of governance: she explained that the coup d'état was "against the constitutional government of my Kingdom. . . and in direct conflict with [Hawai'i's] organic law."⁵² She also strategically situated herself and her government as working within the bounds of both kingdom and international law against the illegal actions of the haole-led oligarchy.⁵³ By using a paradigm that she knew the United States could not deny without also rejecting its own right to rule, Lili'uokalani reaffirmed her position as rightful head of state by virtue of constitutional law.

Unlike Harrison, Cleveland was receptive to the Queen's argument and was wary of the coup government's actions and U.S. Minister Stevens's role in the overthrow. As one of his first undertakings, he withdrew the treaty from the Senate on March 9. Two days later, Secretary of State Quintin Gresham assigned James Blount, a former Democratic Congressman from Georgia who headed the House Foreign Relations Committee and an opponent of annexation, to investigate and report to Cleveland about the "conditions of affairs in the Hawaiian Islands, the causes of the revolution by which the Queen's Government was overthrown, [and] the sentiment of the people towards existing authority."⁵⁴ Gresham reminded Blount that the

50. Secretary Foster understood that in a recession year Congress would not look favorably on any treaty that required large amounts of funding and excluded the stipulations regarding the oceanic cable, Pearl Harbor improvements, and the sugar bounty. Love, *Race Over Empire*, 78.

51. Neil Thomas Proto, *The Rights of My People: Lili'uokalani's Enduring Battle with the United States 1893–1917* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2009), 28.

52. Lili'uokalani to Harrison, January 18, 1893. Lili'uokalani, *Papers Relating to the Annexation of the Hawaiian Islands to the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893), 23.

53. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed*, 169.

54. Gresham to Blount, March 11, 1893. James H. Blount, *Foreign Relations of the U.S., 1894: Affairs in Hawaii. Report of the U.S. Special Commissioner James H. Blount to U.S. Secretary of State Walter Q. Gresham Concerning the Hawaiian Kingdom Investigation*, Executive Document No. 47. 53 Cong. 3rd Sess. Washington, 1894 (hereafter cited as Blount report).

U.S. government had no right to interfere in local affairs but would also not tolerate domestic interference from other foreign powers.⁵⁵

Thus, by the time Imada swam to the *Naniwa* on March 16, 1893, the United States still had not annexed Hawai'i as members of the haole-led oligarchy had hoped. Instead, Secretary Foster had chastised Minister Stevens for "impair[ing] . . . the independent sovereignty of the Hawaiian government by substituting the flag and power of the United States," and President Cleveland had requested an independent investigation of the legality of the overthrow.⁵⁶ Having banked on a swift annexation, Thurston and his colleagues found themselves in uncharted waters. What had seemed so certain was now on the verge of collapse. It was no longer clear that the Committee of Thirteen would maintain its authority as the provisional government of Hawai'i or that the kingdom, declared an American protectorate on February 1, 1893, would continue in that status.

Upon his arrival in Hawai'i, Blount noted that the coup government conducted itself as an American protectorate while in negotiations for annexation. Troops from the *Boston* were doing military duty and the American flag was floating over the government building. Citing concern over whether anyone could freely respond to his inquiries when the U.S. presence was so boldly paraded about, on April 1, just two days after his arrival in the archipelago, Blount ordered the removal of the flag and the return of the American troops back to the *USS Boston*.

True to form, leaders of the coup and those with vested interest in the sugar industry attempted to influence Blount's view of the situation. But the po'e aloha 'āina also made it a point to meet with the commissioner to convey their anger and concern. They informed him that Hawaiians from all positions in society found the overthrow both illegal and reprehensible. On May 3, 1893 a committee comprised of five members from Hui Aloha 'Āina presented Blount with a statement of protest addressed to President Cleveland that again called on Western frames of nationhood and state-based sovereignty.⁵⁷ They noted that they were an "association numbering over 8,000 legal voters, created for the purpose of preserving the autonomy of the country under the native Monarchy," and argued that while the queen

55. Ibid.

56. Foster to Stevens, February 11, 1893. John Foster, *Papers Relating to the Annexation of the Hawaiian Islands to the United States* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1893), 44-45.

57. The five committee members were John Richardson (Maui), S.H.K. Ne (Hawai'i), J.K. Kaiheopulani (Moloka'i), Ben Naukana (O'ahu), and J.A. Akina (Kaua'i).

was “simply deprived of her throne, power, and revenues . . . the people ha[d] lost their dearest liberties and civil rights . . . and were on the eve of losing even their nationality.”⁵⁸ They also strategically reminded Blount that the provisional government was nothing more than a “temporary *de facto* police organization” that did not have the backing of the majority of people.⁵⁹

Besides using official diplomatic pathways of protest, po‘e aloha ‘āina also took to methods outside of official channels to object to the overthrow and assert Hawaiian sovereignty over the Islands. For example, on February 1, the day Minister Stevens declared Hawai‘i as a U.S. protectorate, most members of the Royal Hawaiian Band, which had been funded by the kingdom since its inception in 1836, quit instead of signing an oath of loyalty to the coup government.⁶⁰ They formed a royalist organization called the National Band and performed songs such as the “Lili‘uokalani March” and “Hawai‘i Pono‘i.” Across Honolulu, Kaumakapili church’s bell could be heard each morning from four to four-thirty as it called members to pray for restoration of their queen. Individuals voiced their discontent by sewing quilts with the Hawaiian flag or withholding their church offerings in demonstration against ministers who supported the coup government.⁶¹

These everyday actions by organizations and individuals, along with the protests of Hui Kālai‘āina and the men’s and women’s branches of Hui Aloha ‘Āina, convinced Commissioner Blount of the illegality of the overthrow and the unethical actions of the haole-led oligarchy. Despite numerous attempts at persuasion by members of the provisional government, Blount communicated his findings in a report to President Cleveland and also made his sentiments known to Secretary of State Gresham.⁶² Just one week after his arrival in Hawai‘i, he wrote to the newly appointed Gresham, and he noted that when U.S. forces are used to support the provisional government and “suppress movements on their part . . . its good faith is impugned.”⁶³

It was within this tenuous environment that the leaders of the coup government, and their U.S. government accomplice, Foreign Minister

58. Blount Report, 1296.

59. Ibid, 1297.

60. The Royal Hawaiian Band was formed in 1836 by Kauikeaouli (King Kamehameha III).

61. Albertine Loomis, *For Whom Are the Stars?* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1976), 44–48; Silva, *Aloha Betrayed*, 134–35.

62. This is often referred to as the “Blount Report.”

63. Blount Report, 476.

Stevens, were faced with the question of how to proceed in the Imada case.⁶⁴ Stevens believed that the arrival of two Japanese warships, the *Kongo*, on January 28 and the *Naniwa* on February 23, along with the arrival of the British cruiser *Garnet* on the same day, was more than a coincidence. Two weeks before Imada's escape, he had expressed his concerns to Secretary of State Foster claiming that British Minister Wodehouse and Japanese Consul General Fujii were planning to form a "tripartite management" between Japan, Great Britain, and the Hawaiian monarchy, which would work to "squeeze out American interests" in the Islands.⁶⁵ In the wake of the escape and resulting escalated concern over Japan's intentions, Stevens again wrote to the Secretary of State, this time the newly appointed Quintin Gresham, and explained that Hawai'i was in danger of "Japanization" if the *USS Boston* troops were recalled.⁶⁶ Just five days before Blount's arrival he also advised Gresham that the U.S. flag should not be removed from the provisional government building until this "Japanese menace" was ended.⁶⁷

Placed in this context, the "escapee incident" magnified the political uncertainty in Hawai'i. By raising the specter of "Japanization," annexationists worked to push U.S. politicians toward their goal. For example, on March 17, 1893 the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser (PCA)*, a mouthpiece for the annexationists, ran two articles covering Imada's escape which highlighted the provisional government's request for the return of the prisoner and Japan's refusal to do so.⁶⁸ In one of the articles the author described the *Naniwa* as "a piece of Japanese territory, subject to Japanese laws, and merely temporarily set down in Honolulu harbor."⁶⁹ Three days later, the *PCA* again fueled anti-Japanese sentiment by reporting on a rumor that linked the arrival of the *Naniwa* with a possible marriage between the Hawaiian and Japanese royal families:

64. President Cleveland did not announce his opinion that the provisional government had acted illegally until December 1893.

65. Stevens to Foster, No. 88, 1 March 1893, *Despatches from American Ministers in Hawai'i to the Secretary of State*, National Archives; William Russ, *The Hawaiian Revolution*, 158.

66. William Russ Jr., *The Hawaiian Revolution 1893-94* (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1992), 159.

67. Stevens to Foster, No. 93, 24 March 1893, *Despatches from American Ministers in Hawai'i to the Secretary of State*, National Archives.

68. The *Pacific Commercial Advertiser (PCA)* debuted in Honolulu on July 2, 1856. It was an English-language newspaper that supported the 1893 overthrow and pro-annexation sentiment. *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, March 17, 1893.

69. *Ibid.*

There is little doubt that Japan looks upon these islands with an eye of longing, and that there has been a plan underfoot to bring them under Japanese influence by the marriage of one of the Princes of the Imperial House with Kaiulani. The young Prince now on board the *Naniwa* . . . is the one whom the Japanese Government have had in mind for this purpose . . . So long as the United States maintains any claim to ascendancy in these islands, it is safe to assume that there will be no interference from any other quarter. If that claim should be withdrawn, it is exceedingly doubtful whether Japan would withhold her hand any longer from the Hawaiian Pear.⁷⁰

While the unnamed author of the piece admitted that nothing more than rumor informed the report, the article's points were extremely clear: the docked *Naniwa* represented the Meiji threat and a strong American presence in the Islands was essential to ward off a political union with Japan.

Throughout the next several weeks the *PCA* continued to stoke the annexationists' fire with continuous coverage of the *Naniwa*'s other guest. For example, in a March 21 article entitled "Rumors of War," the paper reported on gossip that suggested Japan's intention to take over the Hawaiian archipelago. The story claimed that the provisional government's Executive Council would make a demand for the "Japanese murderer" and that men from Camp Boston would be directed to board the warship if the request was not met.⁷¹ Although the *PCA* acknowledged the sensationalized nature of its coverage, its stories underscored the idea that Hawai'i was already inscribed as "Japanese space." For example, the paper continued to report as fact that the *Naniwa* had enough small arms to "equip two to three thousand men" and that the cruiser was initially sent to the Islands to raise the Japanese flag over the government building. The only thing that was stopping the Meiji takeover, the paper claimed, was the presence of the American flag waving in downtown Honolulu.

These rumors, together with a growing uncertainty about the support of the U.S. government and Blount's actions, must have weighed heavily on the minds of members of the Annexation Club as they waited for a reply from the Imperial government of Japan on their request to return Imada. Members of the oligarchy found themselves in a delicate position. If the earlier commitments Stevens had secured from the United States remained intact, the United States would soon annex the archipelago, an action that the oligarchs tried to foster through underlining the presence of Japanese in Hawai'i. But having been among

70. Ibid, March 20, 1893.

71. Ibid.



FIGURE 2. Japanese cruiser, “Naniwa” docked in Honolulu Harbor. *Courtesy of Hawai‘i State Archives, Brother Bertram Collection.*

the group of men who pushed for the passing of the 1875 Reciprocity Treaty despite voiced concern over the Islands’ multi-racial population, Dole and Thurston understood that they had to convince the United States that Hawai‘i’s population would not threaten the country’s “ideal” demography.

JAPANESE SETTLER COLONIALISM AND THE FIGHT FOR VOTING RIGHTS

The 1893 overthrow severely restricted Issei access to the ballot box, a right they possessed under the monarchy. Limiting access to suffrage was one of the strategies implemented by haole elite to maintain power in the archipelago amid the confluence of political interest and the growing Japanese population.⁷² Analyzing the writings of Japanese ideologues and the political exchanges that occurred between Meiji officials and haole oligarchs regarding

72. Between 1885 and 1894, 26,069 Issei migrated to Hawai‘i under supervision of the Japanese government. Between 1894 and 1900, when the Meiji government ceded control to private emigration companies, approximately 57,000 immigrants arrived in Hawai‘i. By 1900 the Issei made up 40 percent of Hawai‘i’s population. See Moon-Kie Jung, *Reworking Race*, 78.

Japanese franchise reveals the fragility of the coup government's position. It also illuminates how these negotiations mutually reinforced the United States' and Japan's status as emerging imperial powers while simultaneously negating the Indigenous claim to state-based sovereignty.

Just as the United States, Hawaiian Kingdom, and provisional government found themselves at critical junctures in the formation of the modern nation-state, so too did the newly established Meiji state. While much has been made of Japan's entrance into global expansion with the victory over China in the 1894–95 Sino-Japanese War, Hawai'i was one of the first stages outside of Asia upon which the Meiji oligarchy stood to define itself as a modern nation-state to be respected by other foreign powers. In 1868 the 265-year reign of the Tokugawa *Bafuku* had come to an end with the "restoration" of rule under the Meiji emperor. During the Tokugawa period both society and polity were "maintained by the accentuation of social, cultural, and . . . political differences . . . [which] contributed to the insularity of local communities from each other."⁷³ Thus when Meiji oligarchs ushered in the "restoration" of imperial rule, they were met with a populace that had a "limited consciousness of national identity" and favored strong local rather than national ties.⁷⁴ As a result, the Meiji era opened with a flood of policy and pageantry aimed at bringing together a unified national culture. While Meiji oligarchs were busy attempting to establish a national identity at home, they also strove for recognition in the international field.⁷⁵ Migration and colonial expansion worked in tandem to support Japanese settler colonialism, as exemplified in the occupation of Hokkaido in 1869.⁷⁶ As part of this development, officials were highly aware of how their subjects were treated in the global arena.

73. T. Fujitani, *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 5.

74. *Ibid.*, 6.

75. See Michael Auslin, *Negotiating with Imperialism: The Unequal Treaties and the Culture of Japanese Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); and Peter Duus, *The Abacus and the Sword: The Japanese Penetration of Korea 1895–1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

76. Because of its late arrival onto the global imperial scene, from the moment of its "restoration," the Meiji state prioritized establishing the structures and policies—including imperialistic practices—that would signal to the West that Japan was a modern nation-state and not a candidate for colonization. For more information on Japanese settler colonialism, see Azuma, *In Search of Our Frontier*; Sidney Xu Lu, *The Making of Japanese Settler Colonialism: Malthusianism and Trans-Pacific Migration, 1868–1961* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Jun

For Meiji government leaders and Issei laborers alike, citizenship and the rights which this category entailed became relevant in the context of foreign affairs. During the late nineteenth century the problem for the Meiji state was, “how would the individual and the nation-state be integrated?”⁷⁷ In 1893 the concept of “citizen” did not exist in Japan. Membership in the nation and the political protection which that category provided became tantamount issues to Meiji leaders only when their subjects left Japan and encountered other articulations of nation and citizenry in inter-imperial spaces like Hawai‘i. Meiji oligarchs had “hardly begun to conceptualize the state and its integration with its constituent persons,” thus articulations of the nation-state’s identity were in large part determined by encounters on the outside.⁷⁸ Consequently, both the question of Imada’s return and the debate over the Issei right to vote in Hawai‘i proved to be encounters that affected Japan’s national and state project.

The socio-political instability created by the 1893 overthrow presented Meiji ideologues and government officials, as well as Hawai‘i’s Issei population—who numbered around twenty thousand—with an opening to set up the political foundation for Japanese settler colonialism in the archipelago via access to the ballot box. Seikyōsha and Expedition Society member, Betten Nagasawa, expanded on this idea in his 1893 treatise, *The Yankees (Yankii)*. He argued that obtaining the Issei right to vote was an integral step to facilitating the future of Japanese colonialism not just in Hawai‘i, but in toto. In Nagasawa’s opinion, access to franchise would “enable Japanese to take on white Americans and Europeans in the islands on equal grounds” and ultimately, “demonstrate their inherent racial superiority.”⁷⁹

In this Japanese expansionist’s vision, the Hawaiian claim to sovereignty was not just erased, it was deemed unworthy of recognition. Echoing the racist logic espoused by white settlers against Indigenous peoples in the “American West,” Nagasawa reduced Hawaiians to “uncivilized” beings ready for Japanese conquest and domination. According to San Francisco-based Nagasawa, the haole-led oligarchy had risen to power because Hawaiians were

Uchida, *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876–1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

77. Douglas R. Howland, *Translating the West: Language and Political Reason in Nineteenth Century Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2002), 186.

78. Ibid, 187. See also, Yasuko Takezawa, “Translating and Transforming ‘Race’: Early Meiji Period Textbooks,” *Japanese Studies* 31, no. 1 (2015): 5–21.

79. Azuma, *In Search of Our Frontier*, 50.

racially and culturally deficient and would rather, “dance the hula than sacrifice their lives for the sake of their nation.”⁸⁰ Elaborating on his vision of Japanese settler colonialism he wrote, “If the Japanese acquire the right of suffrage in Hawai‘i and elect five or six congressmen or one or two ministers, they would not have to meet the same fate as the Chinese have met. The dominance of the Japanese will reign over the Sandwich Islands.”⁸¹ Nagasawa concluded that because Japanese people, including plantation workers and day laborers, were racially superior, they would be able to topple the haole-led oligarchy, bring Hawai‘i’s politics and economy under their control, and lay the groundwork for a “new Japan” in the islands.⁸²

Despite his passionate writings, Nagasawa proved to be more of an ideologue than a mobilizer, and he did not take direct action in Hawai‘i. Japanese Patriotic League member Tsutau Tsugawara however, arrived in Honolulu from San Francisco at the end of January 1893 and quickly joined up with a circle of locally based Issei activists. They traveled around the Islands together, “hoping to affect the consciousness of common plantation workers” and marshal support from them for Japanese male suffrage.⁸³ As they trekked over rough dirt roads and ocean crossings in order to speak to the various plantation communities in the archipelago, these men explained that the vote, and *their* vote, was necessary to not only stop the U.S. encroachment on Hawai‘i and the Pacific, but also expand the power of the Meiji state.

While Issei ideologues and local community leaders attempted to rally the local Japanese population to their expansionist cause, Hawaiian royalists also saw the potential of this large laboring population. According to Lucien Young’s testimony in the *Morgan Report*, roughly four hundred Issei plantation workers made their way over twenty miles from rural O‘ahu into Honolulu in order to protest the overthrow.⁸⁴ With their machetes held high, they loudly demanded the restoration of the monarchy. Rumor was that those fighting to restore the queen had informed Issei plantation workers

80. Nagasawa Betten, “Yankii” (1893) in *Seikyōsha bungakushū*, ed. Matsumoto Sannosuke (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1980), 311–42 as quoted in Azuma, *In Search of Our Frontier*, 48.

81. Nagasawa Betten, “Yankii” (1893) in *Seikyōsha bungakushū*, ed. Matsumoto Sannosuke (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1980), 339 as quoted in Azuma, *In Search of Our Frontier*, 50.

82. Azuma, *In Search of Our Frontier*, 48.

83. *Ibid.*, 51.

84. Lucien Young was lieutenant in the U.S. Navy who was onboard the *USS Boston* following the overthrow.

that U.S. annexation would result in the permanent extension of their labor contracts and that they would be, “slaves the rest of [the] time.”⁸⁵

Unfortunately for ideologues like Nagasawa and for the rural Issei, after taking political power away from the monarchy, the elite haole planter class turned its full attention to the perceived threat their community presented. By 1890 Issei constituted the second-largest population in the Islands after Hawaiians; they were roughly three times that of all Europeans, excluding the Portuguese; and six times that of white Americans.⁸⁶ Given the disparity in numbers, haole oligarchs, like Japanese expansionists, understood that they would lose political and economic control over Hawai‘i if an Issei constituency were allowed the right to vote.⁸⁷

The fact that access to U.S. citizenship and the right to political franchise rested on race was not lost on Dole. Consequently, he and his fellow annexationists attempted to put off both the Japanese and Chinese efforts at gaining equal political access within the provisional government until their desired annexation to the United States was achieved.⁸⁸ Exactly one week after the escape of Imada, Consul General Fujii wrote to Dole to remind him of the 1871 *Treaty of Friendship and Commerce* between Japan and the Hawaiian Kingdom, which stated that Japanese subjects in the Islands were entitled to, “enjoying at all times the same privileges as may have been, or may hereafter be granted to the citizens or subjects of any other nation.”⁸⁹ Fujii pointed out that although voting rights were accorded to Americans and Europeans, including the Portuguese, they were unlawfully withheld from

85. Young testimony, “Morgan Report,” 342.

86. “The Census of 1890 by Age and Nationality, Showing Number of Registered Voters,” *Hawaiian Almanac and Annual for 1894: A Handbook of Information on Matters Relating to the Hawaiian Islands, Original and Selected, of Value to Merchants, Tourists, and Others*. (Honolulu: Press Publishing Company Steam Print, 1893), 14. The 1890 Census figures are as follows: Americans, 1,928; British, 1,344; Germans, 1,034; French, 70; Norwegians, 227; Portuguese, 8,602; Japanese, 12,360.

87. Expansionists in Japan also understood this fact and pressed the Meiji government to agitate for the Issei right to vote.

88. The local Chinese population in Hawai‘i also pushed for franchise on several occasions. Despite their attempts, they lacked the backing of the Chinese state and the society disbanded. See “Cabinet Council Minutes August 1, 1887,” Hawai‘i State Archives; *Daily Bulletin* (Honolulu) May 15, 1894; Chung Kun Ai, *My Seventy Nine Years in Hawaii* (Hong Kong: Cosmorama Pictorial Publisher, 1960), 173–74.

89. “Treaty of Friendship and Commerce Between the Kingdom of Hawaii and the Empire of Japan, Hawai‘i-Japan,” August 19, 1871. See *Treaties and Conventions of the Hawaiian Kingdom* (Honolulu: Pae ‘Aina Productions, 2005).

the Issei.⁹⁰ To this, Dole replied that annexation negotiations between the provisional government and the United States for political union were in progress and if successful, the U.S. federal government would become responsible for all questions concerning foreign states.⁹¹

One of the more immediate results of the diplomatic exchanges and everyday protests over Imada's future and Japanese franchise was the Issei incorporation into a national political praxis that created a conscious de-territorialized "Japanese people." In response to the continued barriers to their political participation, leaders of the Issei community increasingly emphasized both their ties to Japan and their role as colonizers, thereby inscribing the Hawaiian archipelago as "Japanese space." For example, under the guidance of members from the San Francisco-based Japanese Patriotic League, Hawai'i-based Issei intelligentsia and religious leaders formed the Japanese Alliance (Nihonjin Dōmei), with branches in Hilo and Honolulu. Alliance members publicly protested their denial of political rights in the coup state and submitted four separate petitions to the Japanese Consulate in Honolulu. Each petition "demanded that Tokyo take a proactive role in championing the cause of national expansion and render its full support for their struggle to secure suffrage in Hawai'i."⁹² Citing the development of a sustainable community which, besides sugar and coffee field labor, supported small merchants, small farmers, doctors, and other professionals, Alliance members framed themselves as participants in Japanese colonization and representatives of the nation who deserved the protection of the Meiji state.⁹³

In this articulation of transpacific empire, the Hawaiian right to self-government, territorial integrity, and cultural autonomy did not exist. Instead, according to the over six thousand Issei who signed the petitions, the failure of the Meiji government to secure equitable political privileges disgraced and dishonored their community, and by extension, Japan: "It is not merely because of the numerical strength that we wish political suffrage, but to maintain the dignity of 40,000,000 Japanese in Japan."⁹⁴ Evidently,

90. Fujii to Dole, 23 March 1893, Records of the Foreign Office and Executive, Foreign Officials in Hawai'i, Series 403, Box 17, Folders 259–60, Hawai'i State Archives.

91. Dole to Fujii, 10 April 1893, Folders 259–60, Box 17, Series 403, Records of the Foreign Office and Executive, Foreign Officials in Hawai'i, Hawai'i State Archives.

92. Azuma, *In Search of Our Frontier*, 52.

93. Ryukichi Kihara, *Hawaii Nihonjin Shi* [History of the Japanese People in Hawai'i] (Tokyo: Bunseisha, 1935); Conroy, *Japanese Frontier in Hawai'i*, 99; *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* (Honolulu), 6 April 1893.

94. *Hawaiian Star*, April 8, 1893.

residing within a space of inter-imperial conflict had fostered a social and political awareness that allowed the Issei community to not just place themselves within the same socio-political context of those in Japan, but to also feel justified in shaming the Meiji state into defending them.

REACTIONS FROM JAPAN

From his office in Tokyo, Robert Irwin wrote to Dole warning him of the growing public opinion in Japan concerning Issei franchise rights. As the lead go-between for negotiating contract labor shipments, Irwin had a personal financial stake in maintaining amicable relationships between the provisional and Meiji governments.⁹⁵ He relayed that in a meeting with Japan Minister of Foreign Affairs Munemitsu Mutsu, the latter had informed him of the strong current of public and political opinion favoring the Hawai'i Issei right to vote.⁹⁶ Irwin stressed the importance of balancing the sugar industry's much-needed labor source with the Issei demand for political rights and warned that if voting rights were not achieved, "some action would be taken in the next session of the Imperial Japanese Parliament which may endanger our great industrial Emigration Convention."⁹⁷

Irwin's descriptions of the momentum gained in both political and public arenas points to the transnational nature of the situation. Over the next three months, he sent several letters to Dole informing him of the escalating Japanese support for Issei voting rights in Hawai'i. For example, on June 26, he reported that the Liberal Party, of whom the leaders were, "on very intimate terms with the present Imperial Cabinet" had determined to push for the Japanese right to vote within the next diet.⁹⁸ This was followed by a report of a July 10 large mass gathering at which Toru Hoshi, an ideologue

95. Irwin was appointed Consul General to Japan by Kalākaua in 1881. He also held the position of Commissioner of Immigration and Special Agent of the Hawaiian Kingdom's Board of Immigration.

96. Irwin to Dole, 27 April 1893, Folders 259–60, Box 17, Series 403, Records of the Foreign Office and Executive, Foreign Officials in Hawai'i, Hawai'i State Archives.

97. *Ibid.*

98. Founded in 1881, the first Liberal Party (*Jiyū-tō*) was Japan's first major political party under the parliamentary system. Its members, mostly landowning farmers, spearheaded the Freedom and Popular Rights movement for democracy. Although the party disbanded in 1884, their members joined with other Japanese nationalist groups to agitate for open emigration, national expansion, and imperialism. Members of both groups could also be found in the continental United States. For more information see Azuma, *In Search of Our Frontier*. Irwin to Dole, 26 June 1893, Folders 259–60, Box 17, Series 403, Records of the Foreign Office and Executive, Foreign Officials in Hawai'i, Hawai'i State Archives.

for Japanese imperial expansion in the Pacific and member of the House of Representatives voted in under the Liberal Party, urged Meiji political leaders to press for the right to electoral franchise in Hawai'i.⁹⁹

In light of the fact that up until 1925 Japan imposed strict financial restrictions that limited the right to vote to elite men, Irwin's letters reveal that for the Meiji oligarchs, the issue at stake was much larger than voting rights for Issei emigrants. Instead, the question of franchise for an emigrant population dealt with issues of equal treaties between nations brought together within an inter-imperial context. In truth, the rural Japanese population that comprised the majority of emigrants to Hawai'i posed "great trouble," to the Meiji "government elite and urban intelligentsia."¹⁰⁰ Men like Yukichi Fukuzawa, Japan's foremost scholar in "Western studies" and proponent of national expansionism, worried that "common people of rural origin . . . lack[ed] [the] national consciousness and modern sensibilities" needed to represent the Meiji state in the global arena and discouraged their emigration.¹⁰¹ But when placed in the liminal space of late nineteenth-century Hawai'i, these rural *dekasegi* (migrant laborers) became a proxy for Japan and as such, a focal point of concern when mistreated by other powers in the Pacific.

Back in Honolulu, Fujii gave an interview on April 3, 1893 to a *PCA* reporter regarding both the Japanese quest for franchise rights and the situation surrounding Imada. Fujii did his best to tone down the "Japanese threat" and maintain his country's request for equal treatment. He denied rumors that Japan had any interest in taking control of Hawai'i and maintained that Japanese franchise would not privilege the Issei in the islands, but only give them the same rights that citizens of other European nations held. In regards to Imada, the Consul General stated that the captain of the *Naniwa* could not have given the prisoner back to provisional government officials because he had, "no right to return a man who claimed the protection of the Japanese flag."¹⁰²

99. The Liberal Party referenced here was formed in 1890 and was originally known as the Constitutional Liberal Party. Hoshi was a close ally of Mutsu and a strong advocate for emigrants who traveled to the United States and Hawai'i.

100. Azuma, *Between Two Empires*, 26.

101. Since the process of molding feudalized peasants into imperial subjects had begun in the early 1870s, many of the Hawai'i-bound population had not yet been inculcated into centralized state apparatuses and a resultant national identity. Yukichi Fukuzawa, "Beikoku wa shishi no seisho nari," *Fukuzawa Yukichi zenshū* 9:444; as cited in Azuma, *Between Two Empires*, 19.

102. *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, March 20, 1893.

At 10:00 am on April 20, 1893 the *Naniwa* expelled Imada. Apparently, the Meiji oligarchy did not deem his freedom relevant enough to cause a heightened political riff with the United States. According to eyewitness reports, he was brought to shore by his fellow countrymen in a small rowboat and then was set free on Dillingham Coal Wharf to make his own way.¹⁰³ Provisional government jailers were aware of this drop-off and were waiting to ambush Imada as he attempted to run away on the sandy beach. It was reported by the *PCA* that the Japanese sailors who dropped off the convict were disappointed that he did not have the opportunity to run the gauntlet. They were, evidently, looking forward to an entertaining escape effort and wagering on Imada's getaway. The next day, he was spotted on work detail at Quarantine Island, this time with a weight chained to his leg.

Roughly one year later, in May 1894, leaders of the coup government held a constitutional convention in order to solidify a permanent governing body in the face of the most recent failed annexation attempt. The specter of Japan's rising imperial power articulated via Imada's escape and the Issei right to vote, loomed over the convention. Questions regarding Asian franchise were at the top of the agenda. In order to avoid the charge of open discrimination against the Japanese community and maintain a viable labor source, the oligarchy established the right to vote as a function of citizenship. While this barred most Issei from the ballot box, for those few who qualified, a further provision requiring the ability to read and write either in Hawaiian or English effectively shut them out. Thus, the now renamed "Republic of Hawai'i" withheld voting rights from the Issei as effectively as in the years between 1887 and 1894.¹⁰⁴

Imada's escape and the debate over Issei franchise rights positioned Hawai'i between developing empires that searched for ways to define themselves within the rapidly changing context of global and national space. As the U.S. defined itself as a nation through its empire, the provisional government relied on racial delineations that mirrored those of the United States to determine membership. In Japan, Meiji government officials found themselves contemplating the political rights of a class of people who did not command the same consideration at home. On the ground in Hawai'i and in

103. *Hawaiian Star*, April 20, 1893.

104. Roland, "Orientals and the Suffrage in Hawai'i," 20.

Washington, D.C., Queen Lili'uokalani and the royalist patriotic leagues deployed Western frames of state-based sovereignty to defend their cause.

While Japan and the U.S.-backed coup state each advocated for the primacy of their legal regime in the archipelago, they also reified each other through state-based diplomatic procedure. This article has focused on how the intersection of white and Japanese settler colonialisms brought questions of state-based jurisdiction to the fore, positioning Hawai'i as contested space and in the process, obfuscating Kanaka Maoli claims of political independence. It draws attention to the ways in which both the Issei movement for franchise and Imada's escape captured the imagination of Meiji expansionists and Issei plantation laborers alike, seeding visions of a "new Japan" in the Pacific that countered those of haole oligarchs and American imperialists.

The Issei movement for franchise and Imada's escape also highlight how actions taken by everyday people could sometimes challenge seemingly stable categories such as nation, state, and citizenship and bring the global into the realm of local events and private aspirations. Imada sought only his freedom and in doing so called on the Meiji state for protection. His action forced the provisional government of Hawai'i and the Imperial government of Japan to debate not only which country held access to his body, but like the ongoing debate over franchise rights, also brought the future political configuration of Hawai'i and the Pacific into question.

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