

OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND, OUT OF POWER: LEPROSY, RACE, AND COLONIZATION IN HAWAI‘I

R. D. K. Herman

Leprosy policies in late 19th-century Hawai‘i reflect and embody the mobilization of racial discourses to disempower Hawaiians. These discourses began with early missionary assessments of the causes for disease and depopulation among Hawaiians, but they became more focused as White commercial interests needed control of land and power for the booming plantation industry. The isolation of “lepers” to Kalaupapa peninsula occurred at the same time that White business interests were steadily taking over the Hawaiian government, culminating in the overthrow of Queen Lili‘uokalani in 1893. An analysis of historical materials concerning leprosy during this time reveals the intertwining of leprosy policies and colonization.

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Hūlili: Multidisciplinary Research on Hawaiian Well-Being Vol.6 (2010)
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This article came out of a much larger project on Western writings about Hawai'i and Hawaiians after Captain Cook. I surveyed an enormous volume of literature, from missionary and explorer writings, to government documents, to travel writers, to academic papers, Hawaiian-language schoolbooks, and medical treatises. Across this wide range of texts, it became clear to me that during the 19th century several distinct themes surfaced again and again to discredit Hawaiians and ultimately show that they were unfit to govern themselves. The reasons for this varied depending on the interests of the writers, but collectively they built powerful discourses.

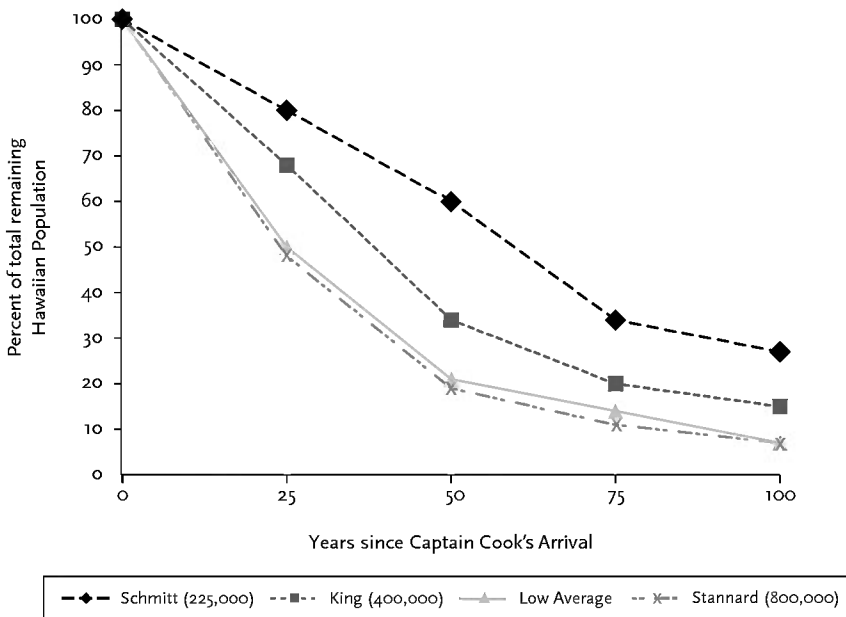
In the first half of the 19th century, health and disease was a major issue, and in this time before modern medicine and health theories, missionaries and other writers struggled to account for the massive dying out of Native Hawaiians. In a 1888 lecture titled "Why Are the Hawaiians Dying Out?" delivered before the Honolulu Social Science Association, Rev. S. E. Bishop summarized the prevailing discourse of the 19th century with a list of causes in the following order: unchastity, drunkenness, oppression by the chiefs, infectious and epidemic diseases, kahunas (priests) and sorcery, idolatry, and wifeless Chinese. Another culprit much discussed was native houses. In all, the blame is largely leveled at Hawaiians and their traditional lifestyle. The story of Hansen's disease is one of the most poignant chapters in this story: the politics were more clear, the knowledge more advanced, and still the finger was pointed at Hawaiians.

We know now that it is the *loss* of the traditional lifestyle that is in fact the major cause of illness among Hawaiians today. It is the modern diet and sedentary lifestyle imported from the West that, according to the 2006 Hawaiian databook, have made Native Hawaiians the racial group with the highest proportion of risk factors leading to illness, disability, and premature death.

This republication of my original 2001 article gives us a chance to reflect again on the power of rhetoric and discourse to convince us who and what is to blame, and to remind ourselves again that we need to look beyond these stage props to the relations of power that foster them.

When Captain Cook first landed in the Hawaiian Islands his seamen left behind, well, semen, and along with it what is believed to have been syphilis. Upon Cook's return 6 months later, the disease had gnawed its way down the island chain, leaving a wake of devastation due to the long immunological isolation of these peoples. Though the extent of the depopulation that resulted remains under debate, there is no question that this began a precipitous decline in the indigenous population (Figure 1; Bushnell, 1993; Stannard, 1989). Diseases introduced by later ships brought on waves of depopulation that continued late into the 19th century. Inadvertently, these epidemics assisted in the political transformation of the islands from an independent Hawaiian Kingdom to a territory of the United States. Depopulation was only part of this shift; the social and cultural collapse they aggravated was a much larger part. But ultimately it was the way these two forces were mobilized in Western colonial discourses that truly sealed the islands' fate.

FIGURE 1 Trajectories of depopulation over 100 years since Cook's 1778 visit. Varying estimates of the initial Hawaiian population all nonetheless suggest a staggering decline.



Note: From *Before the Horror: The Population of Hawai'i on the Eve of Western Contact*, by D. Stannard, 1989. Copyright 1989 University of Hawai'i Social Science Research Institute. Reprinted with permission.

The outbreak of leprosy in the late 19th century represents both an embodiment of and a metaphor for racial discourses that served the colonization of the Hawaiian Islands.¹ Leprosy is but the final chapter in a century-long saga, wherein policies suggested by Western advisers, and enacted with the purported goal of saving the Hawaiians, actually contributed to the downfall of the kingdom. Beneath this veneer lie the privatization of land, the change to a plantation economy, and the steady weakening of Hawaiian rule under the guise of democratization, all serving Western colonization. Sickness and depopulation facilitated these changes by providing the substance for a racial discourse distinguishing Hawaiians as biologically as well as psychologically and morally inferior to the growing White (haole) presence in the islands.² As the haole population came increasingly to control land, economy, and politics, discourses regarding disease and depopulation among Native Hawaiians were increasingly mobilized to legitimize eventual White rule.

Drawing on a range of literature produced by non-Hawaiian observers, this study shows that the treatment of leprosy served as a focal lens for policies and statements aimed at marginalizing Hawaiians physically, discursively, and politically—out of sight, out of mind, out of power. The literature is analyzed in terms of contributing to and reflecting a dominant discursive field. “Discourse” as used here has been elaborated by numerous scholars (Behdad, 1994; de Certeau, 1984; Foucault, 1972; Lowe, 1991) and with particular regard to the construction of race (Gates, 1986; Gould, 1981) and to leprosy (Douglas, 1991; Moblo, 1998).

In keeping with these studies, this work considers discourse as suggesting an economy of signs and statements, of tropes, that direct attention in a particular (though complex) ideological direction. It works like an energy field—invisible but potent, and with no readily distinguishable source. Written records such as those drawn upon here both contributed to and reflected that field in which they were produced. Most important is the observation of Foucault (1972) that discourses are themselves productive, forming the objects of which they speak: They encode meanings upon which decisions and policies are based.

At the same time, it has been well argued that a discourse is not a monolithic, homogeneous entity, but a complex and often contradictory organism, shifting and changing in relation to material, social, and economic circumstances. Discourses shape and are shaped by economic and social interests, particularly of those in power. But this segment of society is not itself homogeneous either; there is disagreement, even cacophony. Behdad (1994, p. 13) argued that the strength of discourse lies in its multiplicity—“the all-inclusiveness of its epistemological field

and its ability to adapt to and incorporate heterogeneous elements.” That there is internal argument does not present an actual challenge to the overall discourse but rather strengthens it. Hence when the term *discourse* is used herein, it refers to a diverse and multivocal field that nonetheless pushes in a distinct direction, albeit with fuzzy edges.

It is the dialectical nature of discourse that is the focus of this study. “Leprosy” (Hansen’s disease) was not a clearly defined medical reality at the time of its impact on the Hawaiian Islands. Rather it was an imagination—a discursive figment that bore little connection to its physical manifestation. The larger discursive field that produced leprosy as such is rooted in the political economy of late 19th-century Hawai‘i, at that time an independent kingdom (constitutional monarchy) with an economy based on foreign-owned plantation industry, predominantly sugar.

Discourses on race (the “nature” of Hawaiians) and on what should become of them and the islands were set into motion by Protestant missionaries who arrived in 1820. As material circumstances changed over the ensuing decades, this discourse became realigned to the new conditions, but never fundamentally changed. The “outbreak” of leprosy starting in the 1860s exemplifies how the missionary-instigated discourse was mobilized to achieve the somewhat realigned goals of its bearers. It is a racially based discourse, targeting a particular ethnic group—Native Hawaiians—as being problematic. Gould (1981), JanMohamed (cited in Gates, 1986), and Tompkins (cited in Gates, 1986) have convincingly argued that racial discourse is driven primarily by economic motives. This is no less the case here.

To elucidate this point requires the disparate components of the discursive field concerning leprosy in the Hawaiian Islands to be contextualized. The dominant discourse does not represent necessarily what average haoles in the islands thought or said, but shows rather the power exerted by particular tropes and how they were used to serve the larger forces of colonialism that were pushing to disempower Native Hawaiians. Such discursive elements were repeated across a range of media—medical reports, government documents, and travel literature. I have outlined elsewhere the overall context of racial science and imagination as they related to colonialism in the Pacific (Herman, 1999b) and the way in which representations of “indolence” were used to colonize Hawaiians in the late 19th century (Herman, 1999a). Moblo’s (1998) excellent work deconstructing the myth of Father Damien has gone a long way toward contextualizing the politics of leprosy in the islands. This study builds on her work.

THE HORROR

The underpinnings of leprosy discourse lie in the very real deadly epidemics of the early 19th century. While the extent of the die-off from introduced diseases is a subject of debate, what is known with greater certainty is that “a devastating loss of life occurred” (Lind, 1980, p. 20). Following “the venereal” introduced by early explorers, epidemics of mumps, smallpox, measles, influenza, and dysentery swept through the islands, affecting primarily the immunologically unprotected Native Hawaiians. The extensive loss of life was noted by missionary observers. Mr. Chamberlain wrote in 1829 that according to witnesses on Moloka‘i, more than one half of the population of the island was swept away within a period of 30 years. “The united testimony of all...has been that, ‘Greater was the number of the dead, than of the living’” (“Sandwich Islands,” 1829). In 1836, the *Missionary Herald* stated that “From the bills of mortality...it appears probable that there have been not less than 100,000 deaths in the Sandwich Islands, of every period of life from infancy to old age, since the arrival of the mission fifteen years ago” (“Sandwich Islands,” 1836b). And after the 1853 smallpox epidemic, it was reported in one location that “Out of a population of about two thousand eight hundred, more than twelve hundred are known to have died; and it is not to be supposed that all the cases of mortality were reported” (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1854).

Assessing the causes for this dramatic die-off without the benefit of modern epidemiology, missionary observers placed blame on the alleged “sins” of the Hawaiians, creating a powerful discourse that blended Hawaiian behavior with their biological vulnerability. This essentialist connection was reinforced over time by the confluence of a new racial science emerging with the expansion of empires in the 19th century. Statistically, the actual rate of decline for the Native Hawaiian population slowed during the 19th century and had come nearly to a halt by the time leprosy was identified. The discourse, however, took on a new life in contradiction to the actual demographics.

SIN AND DEATH

Depopulation formed a quiet backdrop to the main focus of missionary discourse: heathen vices. Moral transformation—the *raison d'être* of missionary work—was the economy that drove the discourse (Thomas, 1993). In their first letter back to New England, the missionaries remarked that “the heathen around us are wasting away by disease, induced not by the climate, but by their imprudence and vices” (“Mission to the Sandwich Islands,” 1821). Consequently, when disease struck with deadly force, “No opportunity was omitted, and no efforts were spared, to impress upon the people the idea that the Lord was holding the rod over them” (“Letter from Mr. Coan,” 1850).³ Over the next two decades, as disease, cultural colonization, capitalization, and a shakeup of worldview bombarded Hawaiian society on multiple fronts, the missionaries built a pervasive discourse that combined all their dissatisfactions with Hawaiians into blaming Hawaiians for their own deaths. The introduction of diseases by foreigners was portrayed as only a contributing factor to an inherent spiritual and physical deficiency in the Hawaiian peoples: “Their very blood is corrupted and the springs of life tainted with disease” (“Sandwich Islands,” 1834). Their behavior was said to compound the problem: They “hold life at a cheap rate,” “take little care of themselves,” live in houses “small, filthy, and open to the rain,” and are “exceedingly slovenly in their habitations and persons.” All of this was said to “show but too plainly the intimate connection between sin and suffering” (“Sandwich Islands,” 1836a).

An 1848 survey of the missionaries conducted by the Minister of Foreign Relations R. C. Wyllie, on a number of topics including causes of the decrease in population, elicited the following responses: licentiousness, bad mothering, impotence due to excessive sex during youth, native houses, native doctors, lack of land tenure, inappropriate use of clothing, idolatry, indolence, and lack of value on life (Wyllie, 1848). This list of ills corresponds with an overt missionary goal that was little short of a complete transformation of Hawai'i into a mirror of American society—or an idealized version thereof.

CHANGES IN THE LAND, 1850–1880

Curiously, the antidote to almost all of the ills said to be afflicting Native Hawaiians was the privatization of land. Private land ownership would make “free men” of them, improving their standard of living and saving them from untimely death. Private land ownership, it was argued, would lead to higher self-esteem, better habits, and housing “better fitted for the preservation of good morals” (Musick, 1897, p. 29).

Under substantial pressure from both internal and external forces, the Hawaiian king Kamehameha III instigated a series of land reforms collectively known as the Mahele (“partitioning”).⁴ As fee-simple land became available, new and more spacious homes did indeed arise, but they were not those of Hawaiians. Even at the time of the Mahele, it was noted that “The native population does not appear to be on the increase; and it appears improbable that the country will ever be filled with a people from the aboriginal stock” (“Sandwich Islands,” 1848). Eleven years later, the echo of this phrase sounded: “much of the property is passing into the hands of the foreign community” (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1859). With the indigenous people disappearing, missionary emphasis now shifted to the place: “The Islands...are to be inhabited in all time to come, we hope and believe, by a Christian people...of whatever race” (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1859).

The upsurge of the plantation economy that followed on the heels of the Mahele changed the economic base of missionary discourse from “saving the Hawaiians” to economic growth per se. Descendants of missionary families easily acquired large tracts of now-available land on which to develop plantations. While at the beginning there was concern about saving the Hawaiians because they were needed as labor, the importation first of Chinese and later of other immigrant workers solved that problem (though it is often forgotten that many Hawaiians did in fact work on the plantations). These changes became much more significant after the signing in 1875 of a Reciprocity Treaty with the United States that allowed Hawaiian sugar to be sold tax-free to the United States. Within a few years, the acreage under sugar doubled, and by 1887 the islands’ sales to the United States had jumped from 547 tons to 100,000 tons per year. The political repercussions of this transformation would eventually overthrow the Hawaiian government and produce the unconsciously ironic phrase, “Sugar is king.” Discourses of depopulation contributed to that process.

The privatization of land and the growth of the plantation industry changed the staging on which missionary discourse had been erected. The Hawaiian Islands held obvious economic (and military) potential. Moreover, that potential could best be realized if power were in the hands of those who understood it: haole entrepreneurs, who formed a cadre of powerful capitalists already wielding increasing power in the islands. But American sentiment was easily aligned to their cause. It is within this shifting economic and political context that the “dying-out of the Hawaiians” became a heightened discourse, even though the rate of depopulation was slowing to a halt. It was, in short, wishful thinking that the Hawaiians would simply go away. The power of the discourse is that it did, to some extent, make them disappear—in the sense that they were depicted as not viable to survive, let alone to rule their own country.

Demographically, the decline of the Hawaiian population—including both Hawaiian and part-Hawaiian—slowed considerably during the 1880s and stabilized by the end of the decade (Table 1).⁵ But during this same time, immigration made Hawaiians a proportionately smaller segment of the overall population. The number of Caucasians jumped from 5.2% shortly before the Reciprocity Treaty to 21% in 1884, though this inflation was due primarily to the immigration of Portuguese laborers who were not considered haole. These laborers had been brought in with the specific intent of balancing the Caucasian population against the growing non-White working class, and it is interesting to note that just prior to annexation, “Caucasians” as a social class formed only 7% of the overall population. During that same time period, the Chinese population had grown from 4% to 23% and after 1884 Japanese were imported in large numbers. While Hawaiians’ numerical decline was slowing to a halt (from 1920 they demonstrated a net increase each decade), Hawaiians dropped proportionally from 91% to 36% of the total population. It seems likely that these changing demographics helped fuel the “dying Hawaiian” discourse. But there were other circumstances as well.

TABLE 1 Population of the Hawaiian Islands by national origin, 1778–1896

Year	Total		Hawaiian		Hawaiian as percentage of total		Haole			Other	
	Hawaiian	Part-Hawaiian	Total	Hawaiian as percentage of total	Haole	Portuguese ^b	Total	Chinese	Japanese		
1778			300,000 ^a								
1796			270,000								
1803			266,000								
1804			154,000								
1805			152,000								
1819			144,000								
1823			152,000								
1832			144,000								
1836			134,925								
1850			107,954								
1853	70,036	983	71,019	97	1,600	87	1,687	364			
1860	65,647	1337	66,984	96	1,815	85	1,900	816			
1866	57,125	1640	58,765	93	2,310	90	2,400	1,306			
1872	49,044	2487	51,531	91	2,520	424	2,944	2,038			
1878	44,088	3420	47,508	82	3,262	486	3,748	6,045			
1884	40,014	4218	44,232	56	6,612	9,967	16,579	18,254	116		
1890	34,436	6186	40,622	45	6,220	12,719	18,939	16,752	12,610		
1896	31,019	8485	39,508	36	7,247	15,191	22,438	21,616	24,407		
Percentages (1896)	28	8	36		7	14	21	20	22		

Note: Base data from Lind (1980, p. 34).

^a This figure is highly contested. Stannard (1989) had put it as high as 800,000. The first missionary counts were 1832 and 1836 (1823 was an estimate), so earlier numbers are uncertain; 1853 marked the first official census count.

^b By local cultural standards, "Portuguese" is a separate group not identified as "haole." Within the plantation hierarchy, they were placed as "lunas" or overseers, midway between the non-White laborers and the White owners.

To the frustration of sugar growers, control of the kingdom—and much of the land—still lay in the hands of the Hawaiian royalty. This was the final obstacle to White control, and the perpetuation of the “dying Hawaiian” discourse can be understood as pushing for the end of Hawaiian rule by making it seem inevitable that Whites—Americans—would come into power. Henry A. Pierce (1871) of the American Legation in Honolulu, for example, wrote the American Secretary of State in 1871 that “The native population is fast disappearing....This country and sovereignty will soon be left to the possession of foreigners....To what foreign nation shall these islands belong if not to the great Republic?” (p. 17). This notion was eagerly peddled by American travel writers visiting the islands, starting as early as 1854 but snowballing into the annexation period. These travel writers spent at most a few months in the islands, and by their own testimony spent their time in the company of the White oligarchy, whose views they clearly accepted as given. Bates’s (1854) pro-annexationist text is riddled with comments on the Hawaiians as a dying race, concluding that the islands “are inhabited by Americans, and are necessary for American commerce” (p. 435). Bliss (1873) assured his readers that “the native race is destined to disappear soon, and give place to the Anglo-Saxons and Chinese” (pp. 59–60). Writing after annexation, Whitney (1899) recaptured the missionary discourse whole, titling an entire chapter “The Passing Native.” Spouting derogatory remarks on a par with the worst of the missionary writings over half a century earlier, Whitney (1899) asserted that the “native, pure and simple, is passing” and so was “fulfilling the unbending laws of nature. His decrease has been startlingly large and rapid...because he himself has abetted it by a fatalism and an early, persistent debauchery more pronounced than revealed perhaps by any other people in modern history” (pp. 62, 69).

“LEPERS”

Against this backdrop appeared leprosy, referred to by Hawaiians as “ma‘i pake” (“Chinese disease”) and attracting public attention in the 1860s. That the reaction by the government’s haole advisors and their expert doctors reflected the colonial mentality toward Hawaiians, rather than the epidemiological and historical character of the disease, is revealed both in recent research and in a close examination of the local literature. Two points are apparent. The first concerns the discursive association between leprosy and morality. Drawing on extensive research,

Moblo (1998) showed that leprosy, which had not been associated with morality since the 16th century, regained this stigma in colonial contexts of the 1800s. Nineteenth-century discourses on leprosy were molded by European and White American attitudes regarding the moral character of native peoples (Moblo, 1998). With the aid of emerging germ theory, whole classes of colonized people were associated with “filth” and categorized as “contaminants” who threatened the civilized Western world.

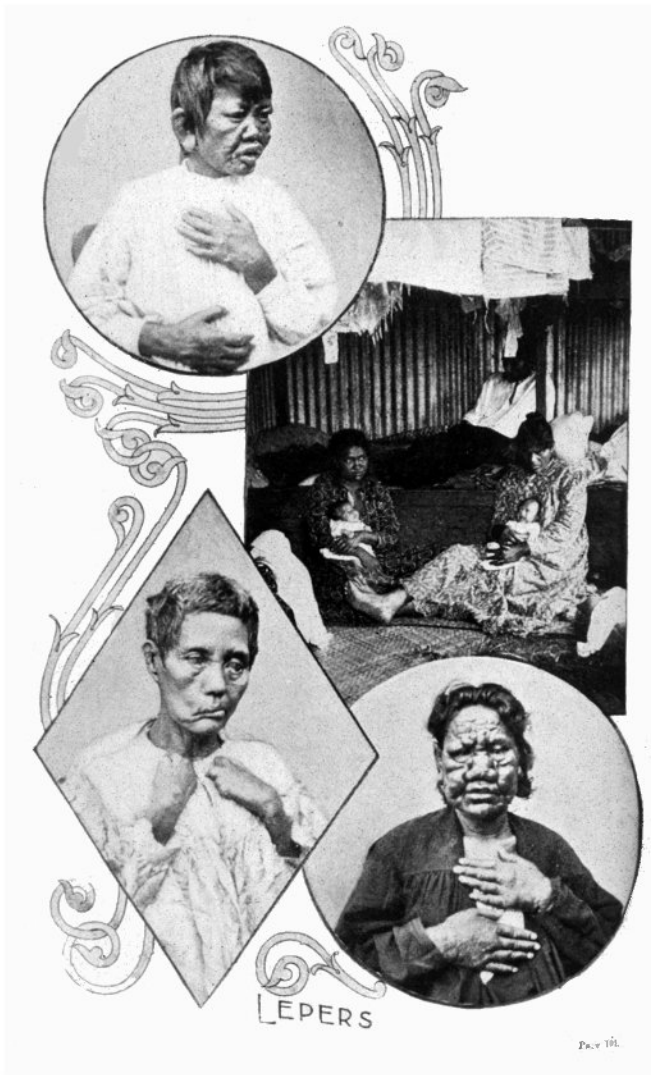
The second point is the sociopolitical context in which “leprosy epidemics” came into being. Douglas (1991) showed that the notion of “filth” constitutes a form of libel, used to disparage and control groups of people. Portraying colonized people as “dirty” corresponds with positioning them “outside” of civilization. (It is certain, by contrast, that in the early 19th century if not later, Hawaiians were far cleaner than their Western counterparts.) Leprosy in the 12th century, Douglas showed, was used politically as an “arrow of accusation” pointing from the elite to the dispossessed, and was accompanied by new means of social control hitherto unassociated with the disease: segregation into leprosariums. Archaeological research has shown that there was in fact no leprosy epidemic in 12th-century Europe; rather “It is more likely that they were trying to cure a real social blight [poor people] by isolating an imagined disease” (Douglas, 1991, p. 733). Social and political context, rather than medical realities, form the context in which it is possible to impute notions of filth to outsiders or undesirables (Douglas, 1991).

Moblo (1998) elucidated how similar circumstances prevailed in the Hawaiian Islands. Records from the early 20th century show that leprosy was far down on the list of diseases taking life in the islands, while tuberculosis ranked number one by a considerable margin. Yet there was no discussion of a tuberculosis epidemic, a fact Moblo attributed not only to the different class connotations associated with each disease but also to the power of leprosy to mobilize the segregation of a particular group: Hawaiians. Now it can be seen that the discourse on leprosy mobilized tropes of filth and sin in powerful ways—aided not a little by

the then-supposed connection between the disease and syphilis. The disfiguring character of leprosy was highlighted as a demonstration of its impure nature, and the missionary-era moral condemnation on Hawaiian culture and lifestyle was brought forcefully to bear. In short, Western medical discourse produced “the leper” as an identity above and beyond other aspects of personhood (Figure 2). Here is one doctor’s description:

Beyond any question of doubt this is the most horrible collection of lepers on earth. The typically altered face, the thickened skin from general infiltration, the immense tumefaction of the frontal and supra-orbital folds, sagging down over the eyes, the cheeks with pillow-like protuberances, covered with broad weals, the nose nodulated and broadened, the ears loaded with neoplastic deposit and the swollen lips mark the physiognomy of the average leper. Then follows the period of decay, their bloated festering faces and their anaesthetic ulcerated limbs render them simply repulsive caricatures of the human form. (Hagan, 1886, p. 88)

FIGURE 2 “Lepers”



Source: Photo collage from J. Musick, *Hawaii, Our New Possessions* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1897).

FIGURE 3 Windward Moloka'i, just east of the Kalaupapa peninsula. In one of these remote valleys, the first patients were established, surrounded by the highest sea cliffs in the world. The formidable pali (cliff face) was used as a natural barrier to isolate suspected "lepers."



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Against this representation of repulsiveness, Hawaiians were condemned for their attitude toward afflicted persons. Hawaiians demonstrated a very different understanding of the relationship between disease and personhood. In Hawaiian language one says, "loa'a ia'u ka ma'i," translating as "the sickness got me," rather than "I got sick." Between sickness and personhood, the latter was more important. Hence to the expressed shock and horror of Western doctors and administrators, "the developed leper, in all his ugliness, deformity and corruption, is in no wise treated differently from the native brother, clean and free from all bodily imperfections" (Woods, 1887, p. 8). Dr. Hagan (1886) remarked that "They surround smallpox sufferers and kiss, embrace and sleep with lepers without any suspicion of results" (p. 88). He noted with astonishment the finding that "Healthy Hawaiians will eat, drink, sleep, and live with a leper voluntarily, and without fear" and that "A healthy Hawaiian man or woman will marry a leper, although there are plenty of well men and women in sight" (p. 88).

Though today the record reveals that fewer than 5% of spouses living with patients contracted the disease (Moblo, 1998), at the time such behavior reinforced the notion that segregation was the only answer to the “epidemic.” At this same period, leprosy patients in Europe were treated much the same as persons with any other disease. Segregation as the solution in Hawai‘i was a throwback to 12th-century policies, yet it was widely espoused. Dr. Arning, arguing for segregation, stated that each leper was “a hot bed of contagion” and “dangerous” (cited in Hagan, 1886, p. 88). Dr. Woods (1887) asserted inaccurately that “everywhere, save among the native races of Hawai‘i, the lepers are shunned, segregated, admitted to no social and few civil relations” (p. 8), and argued in favor of the methods by which leprosy had been eradicated in Europe—namely by

laws of church and state declaring the leper a pariah; by depriving him of all civil rights; by separation—shutting him off from all the rest of mankind, and so letting the infected and the disease die out together; and making a public opinion which should consider this work of ostracism a religious and civil duty....The results show the wisdom of this policy. (Woods, 1887, p. 8)

Dr. Hoffman (1916), calling the disease “loathsome, so tragic, and so hopeless” (p. 81) agreed with Dr. Mouritz’s (1916) assessment that “the disfiguring repulsiveness of leprosy alone demands its segregation” (prologue). He warned of “the inadequacy and danger of any and all methods of treatment other than complete segregation in leprosariums under either state or Federal control” (Hoffman, 1916, p. 83). Such was the attitude among the part of the haole community, and by the 1860s this segment of society wielded enough influence to get the kingdom to agree to quarantine laws. Police officers were empowered to bring every “suspected leper” to the Kalihi reception hospital outside Honolulu.⁶ The verdict of the examining board (“clean,” “suspect,” or “leper”) determined whether or not a person was to be sent to the leper settlement “to remain there until they die.” And as in 12th-century Europe, it is more than likely that many other skin diseases were diagnosed as leprosy.

The first shipment of so-called “lepers” were taken to an isolated valley on the remote windward side of Moloka‘i (Figure 4). Not long afterward, the adjacent isolated peninsula was acquired,⁷ receiving praise for combining “the security of a prison with the advantages of a sanitarium” (Board of Health, 1907; Morrow, 1897, p. 586). Dr. Enders (1876) described it as “comprising about eight square miles...a low plain surrounded on three sides by ocean, which expends its mighty force upon this land, unbroken by reef or shallow water. It is with great difficulty that a landing can be accomplished, and then only by the aid of experienced natives”—and only a few months of the year (Figure 5). “Upon the remaining side rises the lofty pali [cliff] or precipice of Kalaupapa, 2000 feet high. In the side of this pali is cut a narrow path by which the asylum proper is reached” (Enders, 1876, pp. 717–722; Figure 6).

FIGURE 4 Kalaupapa peninsula as seen from the air.



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FIGURE 5 Map of Moloka'i showing the relative position of Kalaupapa peninsula. Moloka'i, a still-rural and remote island despite its proximity to the heavily populated O'ahu, has traditionally had a reputation of isolation.

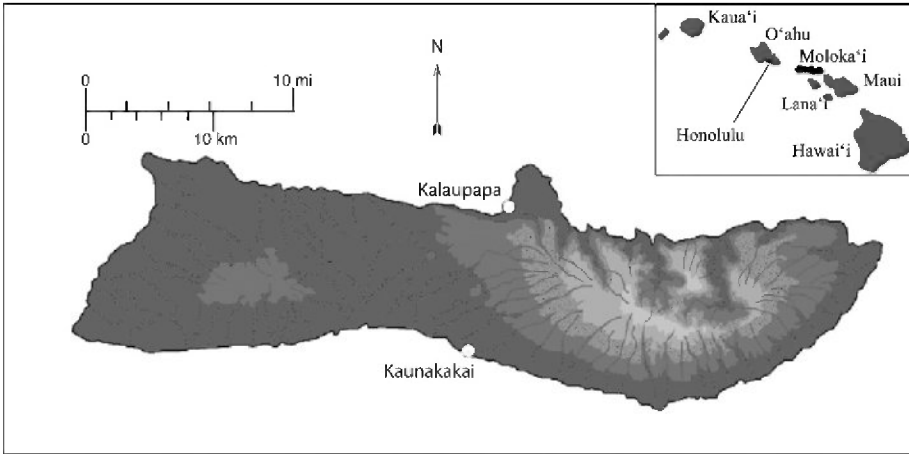


FIGURE 6 The road into Kalaupapa, now managed as a National Park.



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FIGURE 7 Part of the 2-mile stretch of graves lining the road outside the Kalaupapa settlement.



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THE POLITICS OF SEGREGATION

This allegedly wise and beneficent policy of segregation has been shown by Moblo (1998) to reflect instabilities in the power relations between Hawaiian rule and the White oligarchy. Shipments of patients to Kalaupapa peaked markedly in years when Hawaiians' power was diminished. Overall, the number of people segregated rose during the decade from the Bayonet Constitution (discussed below) to annexation, peaking dramatically with the first event, and notably with the 1893 overthrow of the monarchy and again with annexation, and waning afterward. Moblo suggested that this reflects a “changed fervour in disgracing natives at a time of political crisis rather than incidence of disease” (p. 699). As with the haole discourses on disease and depopulation in general, the myth of the leprosy epidemic legitimized the Hawaiian loss of resources and sovereignty and naturalized the shift in power. Moreover, as with other introduced diseases, leprosy did not spread evenly among the population but disproportionately afflicted Native Hawaiians—at the same rate as other illnesses. Yet the quarantine policy itself

was unevenly administered. Foreigners stricken with the disease were given the privilege of leaving the country, such that “as a rule only the poorer and more destitute [were] committed” (Morrow, 1897, p. 589). The sense of Hawaiians as a “contaminated” population was a threat to the sugar industry and to annexation, so there was need to assure the American public that the contaminated sector posed no threat. But the assertion of control and power over suspected lepers had its counterpart in the larger political arena.

POWER

The increased resistance of Hawaiian leaders to haole policies in general presents a further contextual factor to the increased discourse on “heathenish” Hawaiian habits during this period. David Kalākaua, elected king under the 1864 constitution, moved to bring back and relegitimize Hawaiian cultural elements that had been all but stamped out under missionary-led policies. Kalākaua sponsored the hula (banned for decades) and founded a society to study the ancient Hawaiian arts and sciences, including religion. He was criticized roundly for fostering a “recrudescence of heathenism,” and this stigma was later foisted onto his sister/successor, Queen Lili‘uokalani. Another reading suggests Kalākaua as sponsoring a renewed Hawaiian pride and nationalism that the haole oligarchy found threatening. This confrontation came to a head in 1887 when haole leaders, backed by a well-armed White militia, foisted a new constitution on Kalākaua that reduced his powers to nearly that of a figurehead. The new “Bayonet Constitution” contained income and property qualifications for voting that effectively disenfranchised most Native Hawaiians, thus consolidating White power.

When Queen Lili‘uokalani moved to abrogate the Bayonet Constitution and restore the power of the monarchy and of the Hawaiian people, a committee of 13 White businessmen, backed by U.S. troops, forced her resignation and later proclaimed themselves the government of the new Republic of Hawai‘i. These two acts—the 1887 Bayonet Constitution and the 1893 overthrow—were legitimized substantially by amplifying the discourse of Hawaiian unfitnes: to *survive*, let alone to rule a nation. This discourse, which survived virtually unchallenged until the present

day, posited that “generally speaking, the native gives the matter of republic, or annexation, or monarchy little serious or intelligent thought” (Whitney, 1899, pp. 22–30). Arthur C. James from the *North American Review* stated,

The natives have proved themselves to be incapable of governing and unfitted for the condition of civilization, as is shown by their rapid decline in numbers and their inability to adapt themselves to changed conditions; and the importance of their supposed opinions on annexation has been greatly exaggerated....Indolent and easygoing, they are perfectly content with any form of government which allows them to sun themselves, bedecked with flowers....It is natural that the white man should become the governing power. (Shaw, 1898, pp. 75–78)

Depopulation—with leprosy as its culminating episode—capped off this discourse. Dr. Mouritz’s text on the subject asserted that “the Hawaiian” was inadequately fortified to withstand the strain of civilization “because of his too brief emergence from primitive life.” This translated into popular literature, with a 1915 tourist guidebook stating that “Diseases of civilization, early transmitted by Caucasians, wrought havoc because the Hawaiian standards of morality were not the Anglo-Saxon standards. Superstition, lack of medical knowledge, and carelessness also worked many a death that medical attention might easily have prevented” (Schnack, 1915). In this manner, eight decades of missionary discourse had come to represent the dispossession of Hawaiians as a “natural” result of their physical and moral weaknesses.

RESISTANCE

Native Hawaiians were not, contrary to this discourse, lying down and dying. Rather, they formed a number of political organizations and vigorously debated the appropriate path of Hawaiian government during the 1880s–1890s, with new groups forming after the overthrow to fight for the Queen’s restoration. One group went so far as to stage an armed rebellion in 1895. A recently uncovered petition opposing the 1898 annexation of the islands to the United States was signed by 20,000 Native Hawaiians—half the Hawaiian population of the time. It was by no means a passive takeover. Yet that is the picture that writers were quick to paint.⁸ Nor did Hawaiians take passively to the segregation policy, though their resistance was easily rendered as reflecting their “irrational” behavior. The Hawaiians offered what one doctor called “a stern opposition to the enforcement of...this wise and paternal policy” of segregation (Woods, 1887, p. 207). Another concurred that “Great difficulty has been experienced by the authorities in weeding out and exiling this class of sufferers.” A third spoke of lepers and suspects being “ferreted out” by the local sheriff.

Despite overt acts of resistance by the patients, only a few observers noted that Hawaiians associated the segregation policy with overt colonialism. Two experts stated that

Hawaiians view with ignorant contempt the fears of the foreigners, and appear to think that the law of segregation is a special device aimed at them only to cause trouble, injustice, and break up their homes. The Hawaiians mostly view the segregation of their lepers as a tyrannical act, and wholly unnecessary, and cannot for the life of them perceive that the said law is the only means to prevent their possible extermination. (Mouritz, 1916, p. 59)

Writing after annexation, Dr. Mouritz remarked with amazement: “It has been said in my presence by Hawaiians of the better class, ‘Hawaii is our country, it belongs to us, or at least it did until the haole got possession of most of it. If the haole is afraid of leprosy let him go back to where he came from.’”

The most visible act of resistance took place in the remote valley of Kalalau on the island of Kaua‘i. Months after the overthrow of the monarchy, a police raid on a colony of leprosy sufferers and their families led to a showdown with the fugitive, suspected-leper Ko‘olau. This action, seen by both the new government and the Hawaiians as a show of force, resulted in the death of four police before the campaign against Ko‘olau was abandoned. This act of resistance is comparable with the 1895 uprising—both footnotes of history used to show the desperate yet overall ineffectualness of Hawaiian resistance. But it is now clear that both historical records were written by the “victors” to validate their courses of action.

Moblo (1998) debunked the historical image of passive Hawaiians dying in miserable conditions at Kalaupapa during this time. Patients at Kalaupapa rioted against the White overseers in 1870, and shortly after a Native Hawaiian was installed by the government, they instead chose their own leader. Hawaiians also petitioned the Hawaiian government for 30 years to end the segregation policy altogether and instead establish regional hospitals on all islands. Protestant minister and patient J. K. Kahuila, put in irons and jailed by the legendary Father Damien for being “rebellious,” secured the services of a Honolulu lawyer and called for an investigation of Damien for abuse of power. Moblo (1998) concluded: “the ‘lepers’ of Moloka‘i did not let themselves be forgotten: they could, and did, manipulate the Board of Health with impassioned letters to newspapers” (p. 695).

HAPPY NATIVES

Instead of native resistance, history painted a picture of contented Hawaiians, “happy natives” bedecked with leis, strumming ukuleles, smiling, and singing. This construct of “the Hawaiian” replaced the former one of “indolent heathen” as the new “coin of the realm” in racial discourse. It served colonialism by assuring the haole population (especially on the mainland) that annexation had brought harmony and given Hawaiians an orderly, democratic state properly run by “Americans.” As a symbol of the rightness of American rule, the happy native became a commodity, a spectacle, the quaint exotic Other who was now safely relegated to an appropriate social standing outside the ruling socioethnic elite (Herman, 1999a). And here the patients of Kalaupapa again symbolize the rest of the Hawaiian population. Their physical isolation reflecting the overall

displacement of Hawaiians from their land, they were presented as passive and receptive objects of their colonized status rather than as the active and aggressive body they and the Hawaiian populace at large actually were.

When travel writer Musick (1897) took his readers on a tour of Kalaupapa, he assured them that “As a rule the lepers do not object to segregation, and some of the natives, I have been told, are anxious to be declared lepers and sent to Molokai, where they will be supported at the expense of the Government.”⁹ A young Miss Crawford (1917) wrote in her travelogue,

My spirit of adventure received a slight jar the other day when I was invited to visit the detention station for lepers, although I am told that after donning the rubber coat and gloves provided by the guard, there is really no danger whatever from contagion.

She then wrote:

[T]hey tell me here that on Molokai the Hawaiian Government furnishes everything for their comfort and welfare, and that they are really quite a happy and contented people. They have the best food, plenty of clothing, a library and school, papers, tools of all kinds, musical instruments, theatres, moving picture shows, and in fact all the necessities, and many of the luxuries of life.

Hoffman (1916) similarly stated, “it is absolutely true that, in a general way, there is no more cheerful community than a large leper settlement such as the one on Molokai.” He added, “It is not true...that leper settlements ‘are invariably shunned by people.’ It is, in fact, quite difficult to keep visitors away from Molokai” (pp. 76, 78).

FATHER

Hawaiian resistance, like Hawaiian sovereignty, disappeared beneath the stories of Great (White) Men. For the islands as a whole, it was the “Fathers of Industry” who created the plantations and transformed the land, as well as their subsidiary companies that ran the banks, the transportation services, the utility companies, and virtually everything else. It was, I have argued elsewhere, a new ruling class bearing all the traits ascribed to the Hawaiian ali‘i (chiefs) of old (Herman, 1996).

The resistance to the segregation policy offered by Hawaiians disappears beneath the historical legend of Joseph De Veuster, or “Father Damien.” Moblo (1998) deconstructed this mythical rendering of a great White savior and showed that not only did the Hawaiian leprosy patients dislike him, but they also petitioned to have him removed. Yet history has made Damien a saint who selflessly and usually “single-handedly” (and, in some versions, with superhuman strength) saved the poor, helpless, suffering lepers (see, e.g., Daws, 1973). It is a story in which the patients themselves—their names, their voices, their political efforts—are shadowed from view while the spotlight focuses on the White father. In such a way, the myth of Damien reinforces and parallels the myth of White men in Hawai‘i as the rescuers of a pathetic, dying people. Its aura—or halo—leaves in the shadows the men and the machinations—material, political, discursive—that put Hawaiians out of sight, out of mind.

CONCLUSION: WELCOME TO KALAUPAPA

Among those who fared the best from the economic, social, and political transformation of the Hawaiian Islands were the missionaries and their descendants, who became the powerful sugar barons of the late 19th and early 20th century: Castle & Cooke, Alexander & Baldwin, Amfac—these are now multinational corporations whose Hawaiian activities are reduced to turning plantation lands into tourist resorts and golf courses. It is worthwhile to look back at what the missionary forefathers said as these changes took place. As the Hawaiian population approached its numerical nadir, the missionary association declared,

Our harbours, whose waters were once disturbed only by the dip of the paddle, and the rippling wake of the canoe, now bear on their bosoms hundreds of noble ships, from whose masts wave the flags of the mightiest nations. Our strands, where once the naked native stretched himself like the seal and the sea-elephant, are now occupied with piers and wharves, and animated with the stir and din of commerce. (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1857)

And while boatloads of real or suspected leprosy patients were being dispatched to Kalaupapa, the missionary epitaph on the expected demise of Hawaiians read,

The Custom House Statistics of the Sandwich Islands for 1880 show at a glance the commercial prosperity of the islands. The exports for the year amounted in value to \$4,968,164.40, the imports to \$3,673,268.41, making an excess in exports of \$1,294,925.99. The statistics of emigration and immigration show that the arrivals exceeded the departures by 3,665. Whatever may become of the native population, the Sandwich Islands are clearly destined to hold an important position in the Western World. ("Editorial Paragraphs," 1881, p. 206)

Native Hawaiians never died out as predicted. Today they form a significant and growing percentage within the islands' demographic collage. They do remain disproportionately afflicted by disease, low life expectancy, low income, and incarceration. Areas where they predominate in Honolulu are visibly poorer and reputedly more dangerous than elsewhere. Kalihi—where once the leprosy quarantine and inspection station stood—is, ironically, one such area. But they are also a powerful, politically active force affecting policy in the islands today.

Approximately 6 million tourists come to the Hawaiian Islands every year to indulge in the myth of paradise. The once quiet beaches of Waikiki where Kamehameha I established his residence is part of a bustling conurbation of people, high-rise hotels, and condominiums. What was once a natural paradise

has become a commercial paradise of services—some legal, some not—catering to the “visitor industry.” The landscape of economic success that is Honolulu and Waikiki is now one of concrete and asphalt and steel, surrounded by the monocrop of suburbs cheaply built and exorbitantly priced such that those born and raised there can no longer afford to stay. It is ironic that the landscape of “prosperity” is one of ugly protuberances, festering social sores, and crippling traffic jams.

Hansen’s disease was effectively cured (though new, resistant strains have been detected elsewhere), and on Moloka’i a small population of former patients and their families live a very quiet life. Kalaupapa is now a National Park with tourist access tightly regulated, protecting the peninsula from what would surely be an onslaught of development, most likely a private resort with a golf course. Now, a short bus ride from the small airport ushers the visitor down a road reflecting both the beauty and the horror of this locale: tall coconut palms waving against the backdrop of the near insurmountable pali lean toward the 2 miles of cemetery on the other side of the road. One need not spend long (and indeed, cannot stay overnight) before realizing that this is one of the most beautiful and comparatively untouched spots in the Hawaiian Islands. This place, where Hawaiians were once sent to die, is one place where Hawaiians still live, and still have rights to the land. Kalaupapa, isolated and hidden from view, has in turn become paradise.

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NOTES

1 Leprosy (Hansen’s disease) is generally believed to have been introduced to the Hawaiian Islands by Chinese immigrants in the 1830s or 1840s. When its spread among Native Hawaiians was brought to the attention of the Board of Health in 1883, it was officially recognized as a threat. Segregation became law under an act signed by King Kamehameha V on January 3, 1865 (see Moblo, 1998).

2 The term *haole*, which originally referred to “foreigners,” has become the widely accepted term for referring to the “White” population of the islands, of whatever nationality. Because of its locally specific meaning, it is more accurate than “White” or “Western.” The plural “haoles” is an Americanized term.

3 It is important to note when illness did attack the mission itself, the appraisal was entirely different: “These afflictions we received from the kind hand of our covenant God and Father. ‘Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth; and scourgeth every son, whom he receiveth.’ May our afflictions be sanctified, and then they will be counted among our choicest blessings.” See “Extracts From the Journal of the Missionaries,” *Missionary Herald*, 18, 201–221 (1822).

4 See Kame‘eleihiwa (1992) for a reinterpretation of the forces behind the Mahele.

5 Hawaiians and part-Hawaiians are generally counted separately, though this is generally not true for any other ethnic group. To not count the offspring of Hawaiians as “Hawaiian” would paint a misleading picture of the population trends.

6 By the late 1880s, when leprosy policies were in full force, the power of the monarchy had been diminished by a constitution imposed by foreigners, and foreigners filled many of the seats in the parliament. Given this high degree of foreign influence, it is fair to say that leprosy policy, though enacted by the Hawaiian government, did not reflect Hawaiian attitudes.

7 Though today widely known and designated on maps as the “Kalaupapa” peninsula, this name actually referred to only one settlement on this small shield volcano. Kalawao, a term also used to refer to the entire peninsula, was the first leprosy settlement, on the opposite side. Some sources list “Makanalua” as the original name of the peninsula itself.

8 This petition, uncovered recently by Hawaiian scholar Noenoe Silva, was in a box of government documents in Washington, D.C., that related to the Hawaiian Islands during the 1890s. Silva has pointed out that every haole historian of the Hawaiian Islands would likewise have found this petition, yet never felt its importance to merit a mention.

9 This reflects what could be called the “myth of the *kōkua* (helper),” in which many Hawaiians are presented as both indolent and crazy by seeking to be sent to Kalaupapa as helpers to the patients, or as patients themselves, so as to live free on government handouts while facing certain death. The parallel of this traditional storyline to that of Hawaiians as a whole being passive about depopulation and the loss of sovereignty is intriguing, though it awaits historical analysis.