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The US Military in Hawai'i

Colonialism, Memory and Resistance

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Senior Lecturer in American History and American Studies, University of Glamorgan

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This book is dedicated, with love, to Mary Ellen Ireland

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Cover image. Honolulu, Hawaii: Entering Honolulu Harbor, Hawaiian hula dancers and musicians boarded the transport *Waterbury Victory* off Diamond Head and entertained the troops of the famed 442nd Regimental Combat Team upon their return home. Pictured is Lieutenant Unkei Uchima of Kauai, of the 442nd Combat Team doing the hula with Leonetta Osorio. Courtesy of University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Library.

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Figure 0.1 Military Occupation and Its Impacts in Hawai'i. Created by Summer Nemeth for DMZ-Hawai'i Aloha 'Aina, 2007.

Introduction

On 21 August 2009, a new exhibit called *Creating Hawai'i* made its debut at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History. According to museum publicity, the exhibit's purpose is to examine the gulf in perception between how Americans perceive Hawai'i, exemplified by 'aloha shirts, hula girls, surf boards, and leis,' and the reality of 'exploitation' and American 'annexation' (*Creating Hawai'i*). The gap between perception and reality is considerable: whereas the popular tourism-orientated image of Hawai'i is an idyllic paradise, the islands are also, in fact, home to one of the largest military arsenals in the world. There are 161 military installations in Hawai'i (Kajihiro, 'No Peace' 301), the largest of which are Schofield Barracks, Tripler Army Medical Center, Hickam Air Force Base, Wheeler Air Force Base, Kaneohe Bay Marine Corps Air Station, Fort Shafter Military Reservation, Fort Ruger Military Reservation, and Pearl Harbor Naval Base (Ferguson and Turnbull 1). The military controls 236,303 acres in Hawai'i, including training grounds at Pōhakuloa on the Big Island (Albertini *et al* 7), the Makua Valley on O'ahu, and Barking Sands on Kauai, which has been home, since 1966, to the US military's Pacific Missile Test Range Station. In total, the military controls almost 6 percent of the total land area in the state. On O'ahu, the most densely populated island, the military controls around 22 percent of the island's 382,148 acres (Kajihiro, 'No Peace' 272). Over 78,000 military personnel and their dependants comprise almost 7 percent of the population, and when added together with 112,000 veterans residing in Hawai'i (Schmitt, *Hawai'i Data* 1), the military-connected population comprises approximately 15 percent of Hawai'i's total population, making them a potentially powerful voting block and influential special interest group.¹

Hawai'i is a vital American strategic possession: according to Colonel Mike Lundy, commander of the 25th Combat Aviation Brigade, Hawai'i is 'the optimal power projection platform. It gives us an unbelievable ability to project forward. That's why it will always be important to maintain a presence here' (Tsai). In other words, the islands offer the American military a mid-Pacific base of operations, from which it can enforce US foreign policy decisions and protect American economic interests in the region. Hawai'i is the home of the US Pacific Command (PACOM), whose area of responsibility 'stretches over more than 50 percent of the earth's surface from the west coast of North America to the east coast of Africa,

from Alaska to Antarctica, encompassing 43 countries, 20 territories and possessions and ten US territories, 60 percent of the world's population, the world's six largest armed forces, and five of the seven world-wide US mutual defense treaties' (Kajihiro, 'No Peace' 301), making it '[p]ossibly the largest unified military operation in the world' (Albertini *et al* 2).

Contrary to popular belief, which holds that the United States has no history of colonialism, and that its overseas territories were acquired almost as an afterthought (Drinnon 307–32),² the militarization of Hawai'i did not occur by accident. In fact, American military involvement in Hawai'i has been evident from as early as 1826, when the USS *Dolphin* arrived in Honolulu with orders to investigate and recover debts owed to American merchants by Hawaiian *ali'i* (those of high-rank). In 1893, US Marines supported the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy, an event which paved the way for American annexation in 1898. Between then, and 7 December, 1941, the US fortified the islands by constructing Army camps, gun emplacements, airfields, and, of course, the iconic naval base and shipyard at Pearl Harbor. During World War Two, Hawai'i served as a base for military operations in the Pacific, as millions of men passed through the islands on their way to historic battles at Guadalcanal, Burma, Saipan, Guam, Iwo Jima, and many others. In the decades following World War Two, Hawai'i played a vital role in Cold-War conflicts in Korea and Indochina. For example, Tripler Army Medical Center treated around 65,000 casualties of the Korean conflict, and by 1960 the US Army alone had around 30,000 personnel and dependents stationed on O'ahu, and the US Navy, many more (Theimer 11–12).

In July 1960, soon after the US made Hawai'i its 50th State, *National Geographic* assured Americans that Hawaiians welcomed the US military. The magazine stated, 'The community, having gone through one Pearl Harbor, gains reassurance from the presence of these combat ready forces' (Simpich 6–7). However, islanders' views on the subject are more complicated than this. As Kyle Kajihiro, head of the Hawai'i chapter of the American Friends Service Committee, points out, some are patriotically supportive while others tolerate the military, or are indifferent. Some see the military as an 'obnoxious patron who pays the bills and puts food on the table' ('No Peace' 300), while others view US forces with the hostility of people under military rule. Native Hawaiian political activist Haunani-Kay Trask is in this latter group: she has compared the predicament of Native Hawaiians to that of 'other displaced, dislocated people, such as the Palestinians' (*Native* 18).

While no one section of the community in the islands holds a monopoly on any of these views, Native Hawaiians have a particular grievance against the US military, due to its role in taking away their status as an independent nation. Subsequent American rule did not bring with it the promised 'American Dream,' and the economic and social gap between Native Hawaiians and non-Natives remains large. On the eve of first contact with Captain James Cook in 1778, there were perhaps 800,000 to 1,500,000 natives in Hawai'i. By mid-nineteenth century, however, only 40,000 remained (Stannard, *Before* 37–45). Today, after two centuries of disease and diaspora, there are only around 10,000 people in the state who classify themselves as 'pure' Hawaiian, and a further 220,000 who are of 'mixed' Hawaiian lineage. Native Hawaiians suffer disproportionately from a variety of social ills compared to other inhabitants of the state. For example, life expectancy in Hawai'i is approximately 78 years but for Native Hawaiians it is closer to 68. Infant death rates for Native Hawaiians are double the overall state average. In fact, as Professor David Stannard of the University of Hawai'i points out, 'In every age category up to age 30 the Hawaiian death rate is never less than double, and often is triple, the equivalent general mortality rate in the islands' ('Hawaiians' 16).³

Native Hawaiians compose approximately one-fifth of the state's population but rent or own only one-tenth of its housing units. Over a quarter of those domiciles have reported incomes below the state's poverty line, probably because Native Hawaiians have the highest unemployment rate of all the ethnic groups in Hawai'i. Property-owning Native Hawaiians tend to live in poor quality homes in the more unfashionable neighborhoods, and are almost twice as likely to be below the state's poverty threshold than non-Native property owners. The State's education system also disadvantages Native Hawaiians. They have the highest rates of drop-out in the school system, and less than 50 percent have high school diplomas (Blaisdell 369). At the University of Hawai'i, Native Hawaiians compose less than nine percent of the student body and a Native Hawaiian earns only one out of every 200 graduate degree awards. In the criminal justice system, Native Hawaiians 'persistently rank at the bottom of virtually every index of social well-being' (18) comprising almost 40 percent of state prison inmates even though Native Hawaiians comprise only 20 percent of the state's population and are arrested only in proportion to that ratio. It is, therefore, difficult to find fault with Haunani-Kay Trask's conclusion that Hawaiians remain a 'politically subordinated group suffering all the legacies of conquest: landlessness, disastrous health, diaspora, institutionalization in the military and

prisons, poor educational attainment, and confinement to the service sector of employment' ('Settlers' 3).

However, few of these details have made their way into the American consciousness: for most Americans, Hawai'i is, as the tourist board says, the land of discovery, adventure, indulgence and romance ('Hawai'i, the Islands'). Hawaiian sovereignty activist, Kekuni Blaisdell, claims there is a 'deliberate, intentional, purposeful miseducation and disinformation by the government, by the schools, and by the communications media' to hide the exploitation of Native Hawaiians (369). The same might reasonably be said of the government and media's attitude to the US military presence in the islands. Normally, the accoutrements of war would not sit comfortably with the Edenic imagery propagated by the tourist industry: in fact, they should work to shatter it. However, militarism has been so ingrained in Hawai'i that, to a large extent, its presence has come to be seen as natural and necessary. Non-natives have traditionally written the histories of Hawai'i, built its war monuments, constructed its museum exhibits, and depicted its people in Hollywood films. In these mediums, militarism is often presented as beneficial and normal, and the US military presented as a welcome, protective force, providing security and order. How and why this seemingly natural state of affairs came to be, will emerge over the course of this book.

What follows is a thematic rather than a narrative history of the US military in Hawai'i: it is, nevertheless, structured chronologically, in part, to illustrate the growth and impact of militarism in the islands, but also to enable those unfamiliar with Hawaiian history to better follow the course of events. Each chapter examines how the military's image of itself is replicated through different mediums in different eras. For instance, Chapter 1 discusses how the history of the military in Hawai'i has been shaped and imagined by museum curators and historians; Chapter 2 examines a World War One memorial; Chapter 3, military and civilian cemeteries; Chapter 4, Hollywood movies; and Chapter 5, underground and mainstream newspaper coverage of the Vietnam War era. These mediums convey information, and engage their audiences, in a variety of ways: for example, a war memorial is a permanent marker on the landscape, solid and unchanging, which provides tactile and visual cues as to how the sacrifice of our fallen warriors should be remembered. Movies encourage the temporary suspension of disbelief, entertaining audiences with visual and auditory stimuli. Museums use a variety of visual, audio, and tactile methods to persuade visitors to trust their version of history, whereas newspapers use a combination of the written word and visual images in asking their customers to trust the authority and honesty of

news reporters and feature editors. Added together, they form a powerful advocacy for the benefits of militarism in the islands.

Chapter 1, 'War Stories,' is based on the premise that, in their choice of language and labels, historians do not just describe or retell the past, they also shape it. Until relatively recently, when a new wave of Native Hawaiian scholarship began to unveil Hawai'i's history from a native perspective, the dominant historical lexicon was that of the colonizer. For example, historians often use the term 'gunboat diplomacy' as a metonymy for British imperialism. However, American historians rarely use that term to describe US policy towards Hawai'i in the nineteenth century.⁴ Instead, the military is presented as a positive force in Hawai'i's development into a modern state, and this is reflected in such prominent themes as 'restoring order,' 'progress,' 'creating civilization in the wilderness,' 'patrolling the frontier,' 'protecting American interests,' and 'teaching the natives American values.' This chapter exposes some of these linguistic practices, which have obscured American colonial ambitions in the Pacific, and excused the US military's role therein.

Chapter 2, 'Remembering and Forgetting,' focuses on the Waikīkī War Memorial Park and Natatorium, one of many military *lieu de mémoire* on the island of O'ahu. Situated in Kapi'olani Park, the memorial is comprised of a natatorium with a 100-meter salt water pool, a 20-foot tall entrance arch with four stone eagle sculptures, and an adjacent stone plinth featuring the names of 101 men from Hawai'i who died in the Great War (79 with American forces, and 22 with British). There is, however, considerable doubt as to the accuracy of those casualty figures, continued unease about the appropriateness of its *beaux-arts* design in a Pacific Island setting, and an ongoing debate whether to renovate the now-dilapidated natatorium or demolish it.

The memorial has been beset with problems since it opened in 1927. Although popular with locals and tourists alike, design flaws meant that seawater would not flush away or be replenished from the ocean. Before long, the water became stagnant, and a health hazard. Salt water erosion caused concrete walkways and viewing stands to crack, and the diving board tower began to rust. Periodic renovations could not solve the original design flaws, and in 1973 the City and County of Honolulu and the State of Hawai'i announced plans for its demolition. However, local people opposed the idea, formed a Natatorium Preservation Committee and eventually succeeding in getting the structure listed on the State Register of Historical Places. In 2001, the City and County of Honolulu decided to repair the Natatorium at a cost of almost \$11 million. The façade was renovated, but the interior remained unsafe and unusable.

Much of the debate has been characterized by patriotic feelings about the need to remember Hawai'i's war dead, or by economic pragmatists who point to the memorial's cost.⁵ Thus far, however, the debate has been uninformed by detailed historical analysis. War memorials do not simply recollect past sacrifices: they also shape how conflicts are remembered, and provide instruction about future conduct. It took nine years from when the memorial was first proposed in 1919, to its inauguration in 1927. During this time, competing groups fought for control over the project, including where it would be situated, and what form it would take. Like the current discussions, patriotic groups wanted no expense spared in honoring the dead, while others fretted over how the memorial would be funded. Hawai'i was, however, a much different place in the first two decades of the twentieth century. American patriots, concerned about the islands' inter-racial make-up, championed the '100% Americanism' of its inhabitants. The Waikīkī War Memorial Park and Natatorium is the product of this patriotic campaign.

Chapter 3, 'Unknown Soldiers,' builds on the previous chapter by extending the discussion of remembrance and memorialization to Hawai'i's burial sites. In its scale and design, the Waikīkī War Memorial Park and Natatorium offers a narrowly patriotic way of remembering Hawai'i's Great War dead. This simple story of sacrifice and duty is replicated in military graveyards on O'ahu, for example at the Post Cemetery, Schofield Barracks, and the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific (Punchbowl National Cemetery). Military and national burial rituals impose conformity and order on the dead, creating a sense of common purpose and shared sacrifice. In contrast, remembrance and memorialization at civilian cemeteries can offer a less ordered, and more personal memory of the dead. The headstones and markers, which dot the cemetery landscape, are engraved with information about the dead. Sometimes, they provide only basic, factual information; at other times, however, more personal messages offer insight to a culture's belief system and, on occasion, a family's personal view of the conflict in which their loved ones died. This chapter unearths the forgotten stories of Hawai'i's Great War dead, and examines the differences between private and public remembrance of these men, and that war.

Chapter 4, 'Hooray For Haolewood?,' focuses on cinematic representations of Hawai'i, and situates the islands in what writer Tom Engelhardt calls the 'American war story,' a cycle of sneak attack, retributive military victory, and a period of identity crisis. Movies about Hawai'i can be divided into three categories: (1) Pre-Pearl Harbor, (2) 1942–1955, (3) 1955–1973. In the first period, Hollywood movies emphasize the

otherness of Hawai'i and provide stereotypical and racist views of Hawaiians. In period two, Hollywood films portray Hawai'i as part of America, to emphasize the fact that the Japanese attacked 'America,' not just a US possession. In period three, films about Hawai'i utilize images of the melting pot and 'rainbow state' as a paradigm and lesson for American race relations on the US mainland.

Chapter 5 is a comparative analysis of mainstream and underground Hawai'i newspaper coverage of the Vietnam War era. The mainstream press in Hawai'i is represented by the *Honolulu Advertiser* and *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, and the underground press by publications such as *Carrion Crow*, *Roach*, *Hawaii Free People's Press*, *Gathering Place*, *Liberated Barracks*, and *Another Voice*. The mainstream media in Hawai'i has a comfortable and sympathetic relationship with the US military, and this is illustrated by mainstream newspaper coverage of the Vietnam War, which was supportive of the official reasons for going to war, and often acted as a conduit for the official Washington perspective. Contrary to the myth that Hawai'i was a docile home to US troops in the 1960s, analysis of underground newspapers published during this time reveals a vocal anti-war movement, whose activities often went unnoticed by the mainstream press.

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