

Keeping the Core:

John Dominis Holt, Charles Kenn, and Models for Definition and Preservation of

Kanaka Intellectual Culture in the Mid-Twentieth Century

By

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Abstract

This study examines the works of and public memory surrounding two prominent Native Hawaiian intellectuals of the mid-twentieth century, John Dominis Holt IV and Charles William Kenn. Despite the relative anonymity of the latter among non-academic circles, both men proved crucial to the evolution of Indigenous Hawaiian thought and praxes of preservation throughout their careers. The principal aim of the study was to examine the output of both figures to identify and compare their stances on the attributes, practices, and concepts integral to a broader Native Hawaiian identity, the state of Hawaiian intellectual heritage and preservation at the time of their writing, and the prospects for the same in a post-annexation, foreign-ruled Hawai‘i. These stances were then subject to a juxtapositional analysis, identifying those points of agreement and contention between Holt’s and Kenn’s understandings of Hawaiian intellectual and cultural identity and their history. General findings suggest that while both Holt and Kenn took great issue with reluctance surrounding the preservation of Native intellectual products introduced to the populace by foreign religious officials and institutions, both saw a vital interest in the same among young people and sought to use various means of dissemination to share their knowledge and pride of self with other Indigenous Hawaiian people. Perhaps due to a childhood spent in the company of former aristocrats traumatized by the loss of land and title to Western invaders, however, Holt defined his Native identity in the past tense, using a language of loss or diminishment, while Kenn, a practitioner of Native religion and martial arts, saw a far more present continuity of “traditional” Indigenous Hawaiian practices in his daily life.

The study itself utilized simple textual analyses of written works produced by Holt and Kenn throughout their careers, privileging those pieces explicitly treating with Native identity where possible and aiming to incorporate works intended for academic, enthusiast, and broad lay audiences alike in roughly equal measure. To properly contextualize their contents and concepts, themes, and figures from Hawaiian history integral to my analysis of their portfolios, a secondary source base spanning academic works on religion, linguistics, anthropology, folklore, and history, among other fields, as well as periodicals, commentary, and volumes directed towards broader audiences is consulted throughout.

Introduction

In 2015, the television station PBS Hawai‘i’s program *Insights* hosted a one-hour, moderated discussion on the topic of Hawaiian sovereignty. The format was familiar to the show, as it specialized in relaxed roundtable discussions. The four participants were invited to share their views on, among other items, whether and how Kanaka people should practically pursue greater or complete political autonomy from the United States. All were Indigenous experts respected in their fields and communities alike. Present were Peter Apo, a trustee of the State of Hawai‘i’s Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Doctors Lilikala Kameeleihiwa and Kaleikoa Kaleo, director of the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa’s Hawaiian Studies center and an associate professor at UH Maui, respectively (both historians), and Head of State Dennis “Bumpy” Kanahahele, an activist who founded a small breakaway state based out of a foothill village. Unsurprisingly, all four attendees agreed that a greater measure of sociopolitical freedom would be of substantial benefit to Kanaka people and Hawai‘i as a whole, but that was virtually all the experts agreed on.

The discussion quickly evolved into a gentle, but passionate debate, with each speaker articulating a substantially different series of arguments on, among other issues, to what extent political autonomy should be prioritized and sought through engagement with American and international legal bodies, whether cooperation with American entities such as the Office of Hawaiian Affairs can benefit Kanaka independence in the long term, and whether status as a domestic dependent nation, similar to that afforded Indigenous North American governments by federal authorities, would strengthen or weaken Kanaka sovereignty. It became clear that each Kanaka expert arrived at their

stances through distinct evaluations of Hawaiian and broader American history. Could the US government be expected to keep its word to and avoid further subjugating a compliant, domestic-dependent Kanaka people? It famously did not provide that courtesy to many continental groups, but perhaps the Kanaka could expect different given their legal knowledge and unique institutional history with the US? What was (or should be) more important for sovereignty activists- the removal of American institutions or the recognition of Kanaka analogues as legitimate? Was it more important to pursue independence at any cost, or to partner with outsiders- including American officials- to address social and economic problems in Kanaka communities to better prepare for an independent Hawai‘i? Despite all being respected experts unified by a common cause, *Insights*’ roundtable attendees were broadly divided over how to reach or define attainment of that cause, with their ideological differences irrevocably linked to differing interpretations of Kanaka history. These differing interpretations produced wildly varying prognostications for Kanaka futures with and without the United States.¹

This ideological variance- the assertion of many different, opposing points of view founded upon different experiences, goals, and readings of individual and shared pasts- is often ignored, or skimmed over in even modern Indigenous studies (though it may be unfair to single out Indigenous studies in particular here). The nuance and variance within Indigenous communities, particularly that of ideas and epistemology, is frequently unemployed by Western and Western-educated scholars in favor of a type of gestalt Native community, homogenous in ideology and goals if not in any other dimension.

¹ PBS Hawaii, “What Would It Take to Achieve Hawaiian Sovereignty? | Insights on PBS Hawai‘i,” Jul. 17, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbKMs1Ux3kk&t=799s>.

Even the most sympathetic works, and even some penned by Indigenous people, have fallen into such rhetorical pitfalls. Consider how frequently you have read texts which assert uniform thought, intent, and attitude to “the Hawaiians,” “colonized peoples,” or “the Indigenous.” While generalization cannot be avoided in all use cases, and is thankfully seldom used to thoughtlessly propagate negative stereotypes of Indigenous peoples in serious scholarship of the present, its frequent use can lead to the unwitting creation of Indigenous narratives that simplify the character and experience of concerned communities to the point of erasure. Using the example of the *Insights* panel, if observers were to strive to uncover, the “best” or “most valid” Kanaka independence narrative presented, and ascribe it to “Hawaiian people” or “the Kanaka” writ large without acknowledging both the presence and perceived legitimacy of the other three, they would be presenting uniformity where none existed. This oversimplification risks erasing very real, significant ideological and political divisions present in state- and nation-building dialogues of the sort many colonized people are engaged in today. What is the danger of this? Put simply, reductionist narratives of the sort result in scholarly material that could be didactically harmful for those interested in informing others about the circumstances of Indigenous peoples and communities. Worse still, it can encourage the formation of policy and public perception regarding Native peoples as concerning simple, holistic gestalts, and thus can cause great, if unwitting, empirical harm for said peoples as multi-actor, multi-ideology state- and nation-building processes they engage in are reduced to unifaceted “movements” which could be interacted with or governed as singular actors. By *thinking* of Native communities as possessed of a single mind, ambition, or ideology,

and neglecting the nuance evident within each, we run the risk of *acting* as if they are monolithic, and the potential sociopolitical consequences of such action are unacceptable.

To provide another example of the aforementioned phenomenon as manifested in scholarship of Hawai‘i, consider the hotly-debated question of how Kanaka people perceived Captain James Cook’s arrival. The narrative long extolled by Western scholars and imperial apologists held that the captain, who was among the first European officials to visit the islands and treat with their people, was venerated by all of his Native hosts as a god—the physical avatar of the akua Lono.² This story, similar to those circulated regarding Spanish attorney Hernan Cortez’s unsanctioned invasion of the Mexica capital of Tenochtitlan, was attributed by imperial scholars to a synthesis of his arrival’s overlap with a major religious festival, “obvious superiority” of European technology and knowledge, and the “simplicity” of a uniform Indigenous mind. The narrative of Cook as the powerful god-man uniformly revered as a deity by a sprawling Indigenous society has since been challenged quite successfully, with Western and Indigenous scholarship alike providing evidence that, among other arguments, he would likely have been perceived as simply a man (albeit perhaps one *sanctioned* by providence, while not embodying a divine force himself), and that the deity venerated in the festival he interrupted was not Lono at all, but rather a war god named Ku.³ Such pieces afford Indigenous people far more intellectual and cultural respect and agency, advancing projects aimed at

² Silva, Noenoe K. *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007, 16-21.

Obeyesekere, Gananath. *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific : with a New Afterword by the Author*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997, 3-5, 50-52.

³ Eg. *Ibid.*, 65, 74, 81-82, 96-97.

decolonizing knowledge, and doing away with a hopeful imperial “myth-model” of explorers being so far above their interlocutors as to be perceived as gods, often replace the uniformly naïve, believing Kanaka who understood Cook to be divine with a uniformly skeptical or dismissive Kanaka populace who never entertained the Europeans’ potential spiritual significance at all. Either the Kanaka *all* believed, or they *all* disbelieved; these are the predominant narratives surrounding Cook’s arrival and Indigeneity, with diversity of opinion or ideological/epistemic nuance on the part of Kanaka people seldom entertained.

An exception to this can be found in the work of literary scholar Steven Sumida, who was involved in the development, preservation, critique, and appreciation of Hawai‘i’s multiethnic literary canon through his organization Talk Story, Incorporated. In a volume analyzing significant trends and canons in Hawaiian writing, he dedicated a considerable amount of time to Cook and depictions of his interactions with Kanaka people. I was astounded to see therein, for the first time in over a dozen scholarly analyses of the episode of Cook’s landing, multiplicity of thought and motive ascribed to Kanaka people.⁴ Using extant studies on Kanaka culture, linguistics, religion, and history, Sumida argued for a diverse population that assessed Cook and the question of his spiritual significance in various ways to various ends. He suggested that many likely did not believe Cook to be divine, some perhaps did, and some may have believed him to be blessed by the akua, or deities, as Hawai‘i’s nobility and priesthood were. Other Kanaka

⁴ Noenoe Silva’s analysis of Kanaka textual products of the late-nineteenth century does propose several different reasons for a Cook understood as mortal to be referred to in the language of the divine, but does not entertain the idea of several of them coexisting within a varied Kanaka intellectual landscape.

may have cynically claimed the Europeans to be divine to gain greater prestige from treating with them, and still others may have used the *language* of divinity to describe them figuratively, similarly to how Westerners may describe something great or exceptional in quality as “divine” without understanding it to literally be such.⁵ This depiction should not have been so revelatory, but it caused me to realize that I had never before seen plurality ascribed to Kanakas’ minds and perceptions before, despite reading scores of commentaries on Cook’s arrival by Kanaka activists and allies, as well as imperial apologists, in several scholarly fields. Such nuance allowed for the perception of a Kanaka community far more diverse in ideology and intent— regarding European interlopers and the world more broadly. Sumida’s work and its striking departure from more conventional narratives surrounding Cook drove me to research and articulate other dimensions of Kanaka intellectual diversity, particularly as they pertain to post-annexation interpretations of Hawaiian identity and intellectual heritage.

The purpose of this project is to examine the diverse and nuanced views on Indigenous Hawaiian identity, culture, history, prospects, and intellectual heritage of two leading Kanaka public experts of the mid-twentieth century: John Dominis Holt IV and Charles W. Kenn. These scholars’ work in research, preservation, and education rendered them particularly crucial to the interpretation of a shared Kanaka past in the modern era. Holt, an aristocrat and author, and Kenn, an educator, religious leader, public servant, and martial artist, developed and made accessible knowledge of Hawai‘i’s Kanaka history and culture spanning from pre-contact times to the monarchy, sharing practices, stories,

⁵ Sumida, Stephen H. *And the View from the Shore: Literary Traditions of Hawai‘i*. Seattle, WA, Univ. of Washington Press, 2015, 12-19.

and values that were on the verge of extinction following generations of Western authorities' assault on Native Hawaiian intellectual and epistemic products, along with their worth in a modern world. Holt and Kenn presented a foundation for countless activists, scholars, and artists to build upon, and both are among those professionals credited with doing the thankless work of marginal cultural preservation that would eventually inform a massive uptick in public interest in and support for Kanaka culture and studies. It should be noted, however, that just as the *Insights* panel's commentators were led to wildly different stances on Hawaiian prospects for autonomy based on differing bases of sources and experiences which informed their outlook, along with broadly differing views on what constituted a modern Hawai'i or Hawaiian, Holt and Kenn each were moved to privilege certain types of Kanaka knowledge or stances on the Kanaka past, and constructed their seminal bodies of written and oratory work accordingly.

The practical intent of this project is to assess broad cross-sections of both Holt's and Kenn's voluminous bodies of work for those themes in each which speak to the author's fundamental principles regarding Indigeneity, the Indigenous past and present of Hawai'i, and the ideal strategies for preservation of Native heritage and intellectual products in a post-annexation age. What defined a Native person? What characteristics, practices, and values defined and distinguished Indigenous epistemologies from those developed by colonial societies? Which elements of the colonial experience had proven most disruptive to Indigenous knowledge, why, and how? Which Kanaka arts, virtues, or ways of knowing/doing can and should be preserved in a postcolonial world? How should one preserve them, and at what cost? In which spheres and practices does the core of

Indigenous identity lie? This project will attempt to present Holt and Kenn's answers to such critical questions.

While considerable nuance exists within and between the ideological stances advanced in both Holt's and Kenn's portfolios, some general statements can be made regarding their collective impact on Hawaiian Native intellectual culture, public preservation, and education in the mid-twentieth century. Holt and Kenn both served as principal agents of cultural preservation and continuity between two "Hawaiian Renaissances," periods marked by increased public interest in Kanaka people and products, one occupying the last decades of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth, and the second generally accepted to have begun in the late 1960s or very early 1970s, and lasting a duration subject to some dispute.⁶ The first was driven from the top of Hawaiian society, with Kalakaua's patronage encouraging the production and restoration of Kanaka cultural treasures and practices, while the second was a bottom-up affair, with activists, scholars, Native communities and cultural groups working to spread awareness of Hawaiian history and society with alternating ambivalence and opposition from the American state. The two men each engaged a variety of means and mediums of presentation aimed at popular and elite (academic, governmental) audiences alike to engender investment in and appreciation of Kanaka culture and praxis. Their ruminations

⁶ Largely due to the problem of determining hard beginning and ending dates for cultural movements; consensus can be reached regarding *if* a specific sentiment arose within a population or arena, but exactly *when* is far more difficult for observers to agree on.

Warner, Sam L. No'eau, "Kuleana: The Right, Responsibility, and Authority of Indigenous Peoples to Speak and Make Decisions for Themselves in Language and Cultural Revitalization," *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 30.1, 1999, 68-93.

Williams, Ronald Jr., "The Other Hawaiian Renaissance," *Hana Hou!* 2015, Retrieved October 8, 2021, <https://hanahou.com/17.6/the-other-hawaiian-renaissance>.

on Hawaiian history, when assessed jointly, suggest a significant epistemic disruption in the chains of inheritance which governed the passage of Kanaka knowledge,⁷ heavily influenced by factors including shame in Kanaka identity, fear of Indigenous practices, and a desire to assimilate to Euro-American societies. Western missionaries, industrialists, and policymakers, who attained considerable influence or outright control over state policy and rhetoric in the generations following European contact with the Kanaka kingdom, nurtured all of these factors in Kanaka communities for over a century.⁸ Holt and Kenn's works also suggest that the true loci of Kanaka personhood and epistemic authority lie beyond the political structures cast down with the overthrow of Queen Liliuokalani, Hawai'i's last legitimate ruler, near the close of the nineteenth century. Instead, they locate a Kanaka "core" variously in the realms of culture, epistemology, language, and religion. One final premise of this project, which will be briefly investigated in its final chapter, is the impact of a centralized Hawaiian state (or, more accurately, its post-overthrow vestiges, such as the Kamehameha Schools). The presence of such an institution, powerful, yet constantly struggling with notions of proud Native identity and tradition on one hand and accommodation of virulently intolerant Euro-American partners on the other, yielded a unique character to the evolution and perception of Kanaka intellectual culture. It shifted the legitimacy and respectability of the same to a considerable extent during the twentieth century.

⁷ In other words, informal processes of professionals and elders sharing what they knew with successors or youth to transmit knowledge and context.

⁸ Silva, Noenoe K. *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007, 41-42, 45-46, 64-71.

The first chapter will present a general overview and assessment of John Dominis Holt's literary canon, privileging those works which incorporate themes of Hawaiian history and/or Indigeneity, along with non-fictional analysis of real-world events and phenomena, in order to extract his fundamental conceptualization of Kanaka identity and image for a Kanaka future. Engagement with secondary sources will be kept to a minimum for those sections concerned largely with interpretation of Holt's work, but supplemental source material will be featured more prominently in segments dedicated to examining his broader cultural impact, legacy, and figures or organizations relevant to his story. As secondary sources are concerned, periodicals and lay publications will be more frequently included than scholarly works, in part due to a dearth of such on several niche topics and figures discussed herein. The second chapter will focus on the work of Charles Kenn, whose career predated but largely overlapped with Holt's, allowing for the examination of a time preceding some of the processes of cultural rediscovery that colored Holt's work and outlook.

The third chapter will be dedicated to a synthetic analysis of the work of both men and, emphasizing the project's themes of nuance and plurality, will juxtapose Holt's and Kenn's respective visions for Hawaiians and Hawaiianness in the twentieth century with those of modern influential Kanaka thinkers, with focus on the conflicts between each—all espoused by beloved, respected people, much like the 2015 debate on the *Insights* soundstage. Finally, this chapter will explore those facets of Holt and Kenn's personal lives and experiences which potentially (or demonstrably) affected the content of their work and nature of their ideologies surrounding Indigeneity.

The chief aim of this project’s engagement with and interpretation of Kanaka thinkers and their bodies of work is to arrive at a respectable *phenomenological* understanding of each—understanding their ideas on their terms, in other words. Consequently, assessment of the rhetorical vitality or internal consistency of the same, or the determination of one viewpoint or another to be “more” or “less” Indigenous or helpful to Indigenous peoples falls far beyond the scope of this project. Instead, it aims to define a diverse, nuanced Kanaka intellectual landscape.

I use the term “authentic”, and its derivatives, throughout this thesis. While something of an incendiary term frequently at the heart of debate among humanists, the use of “authentic” here simply pertains to things which, in the eyes of one or more subjects, are understood as having some *legitimate, actual* ties to an earlier time, place, or practice (as opposed to those things which bore *artificial* ties or were *misinterpreted* as genuine articles based on flawed premises) according to individual observers. This usage is not intended to reflect the imperial obsession with taxonomy which has sparked many wrought conversations over how to define or operationalize authenticity as it pertains to Indigenous cultures and whether said cultures possess similar epistemic concepts. In the case of this project, of course, Holt and Kenn will serve as its observers and for the purpose of appraising the “authenticity” of things Kanaka.

Finally, but most crucially, this discussion is written from an outsider’s perspective. I am not Kanaka (or, indeed, of any Indigenous descent), and can therefore claim no personal authority over or investment in the interpretation of the materials assessed herein, nor can or should I attempt to prescribe absolute best practices for the problems

and debates facing Kanaka communities I outline. If I have misinterpreted culturally-coded information or words, or the intellectual and epistemic authority of Native Hawaiian thinkers and participants in civic life, these are honest mistakes born of my legitimate enthusiasm for the wonderful work done by Holt and Kenn, who created foundations for projects of rediscovery which have benefited countless Kanaka people and allies of Indigenous peoples in the present.

Kanaka Intellectual Sovereignty and the Overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom

That said, it is prudent to begin this examination of Hawaiian intellectual culture with a brief survey of its evolution throughout the lengthy period of imperial conflict which led to the 1893 overthrow of the sovereign, Kanaka-ruled Kingdom of Hawai‘i, then among the most powerful states in the Pacific, by a band of predominantly Caucasian American businessmen born in the islands.⁹ The following primer will frequently privilege the work of Kanaka political scientist Noenoe Silva, as her published canon offers perhaps the most comprehensive snapshot of Native Hawaiian intellectual resistance during the islands’ colonization; it is my first suggested port of call for those interested in learning more about the era.

Prior to the insurrection, Hawai‘i’s Native population had been subject to more than a century of ideological and cultural assault at the hands of Western missionary

⁹ Those men were thus afforded joint Hawaiian-American citizenship. They were denounced as criminals under the law of both realms following their coup, but American authorities, silently content to have an economic and political holdfast in the Pacific in order to exert greater control over Asian commerce, refused to act against them or restore the Kanaka dynasty- See *Ibid.*, 167-173, Liliuokalani, *Hawai‘i’s Story by Hawai‘i’s Queen*, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1898, Reprinted Middletown, Delaware, 2020, 106-127, 163-174.

organizations and their allies in mercantile and agricultural concerns. As was the case with many Pacific countries in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Hawai‘i’s colonization was driven by pseudo-autonomous religious agents affiliated with fundamentalist, charismatic, hardline Christian orders offered an incredible opportunity: to fulfill their dominionist dreams by bringing the rhetorical and empirical weight of global empires (which often provided funding and various forms of material support, while not directly driving initial colonization efforts through state apparatuses) to bear on relatively isolated island realms, remaking their societies in the orders’ own intolerant image.¹⁰ The imperial partnership between governments, businesses, and religious orders served each remarkably well in the Pacific. Economic concerns were able to swiftly secure new markets and commodities as plantation farms, ranches, and ports sprung up across the islands, the missionaries established themselves as driving forces of cultural, spiritual, and political change, and governments, of course, acquired new spheres of control without often having to commit their own forces in full during the process of colonization. Representatives of all groups, of course, found considerable wealth and prestige within the realms they invaded; Hawai‘i’s missionaries and Western business speculators (along with their descendants, often referred to as “planters” or “missionary sons”) acquired massive amounts of land, influential positions in Indigenous government,

¹⁰ Morton, Helen. *Becoming Tongan: an Ethnography of Childhood*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1996, 21-23, 54-55, 92, 98, 177-180.
Sua’ali’i-Sauni, Tamasailau, Maualaivao Albert Wendt, Vitolia Mo’a, Naomi Fuamatu, Upolu Luma Va’ai, Reina Whaitiri, and Stephen L. Filipo. *Whispers and Vanities: Samoan Indigenous Knowledge and Religion*. 2014,
Silva, Noenoe K. *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007, 30-32, 51-54.

and considerable influence in a state apparatus that was attempting to Westernize, in part, in order to legitimize itself in the eyes of the avaricious powers seeking to devour it.

In Hawai‘i, the missionaries took a particular interest in the transformation of a Kanaka culture they deemed variously obscene, blasphemous, and—heavily influenced by Enlightenment-era progress doctrine—backwards. They strove towards the conversion of Hawai‘i playing against a centralized Indigenous government, led first by the incredibly popular Kamehameha Dynasty, scions of a great warrior and statesman who united the islands under his rule, and then by the elected noble and artist (David) Kalakaua and his sister Liliuokalani, who would rule the archipelago in the years leading up to the coup. The Hawaiian government and the scores of nobles and cadres who influenced it were variously compliant with missionaries and other outside forces urging assimilation to a Western model of civilization during their protracted engagement with the kingdom. Set against the reign of the incredibly impious Kamehameha II, who flaunted the kapu, a spiritual code of conduct strongly tied to Native Hawaiian notions of governmental and religious legitimacy, along with massive plagues striking the islands thanks to the arrival of Europeans who did not appear to contract the diseases in question (therefore leading some to believe that the god to which they prayed for health was “more powerful” than Kanaka analogues), a considerable number of legitimate conversions to Western Christianity and the belief systems regarding civilization, progress, and the superiority of Western society also encouraged by missionaries took place.¹¹ Under the influence of Westerners and their Kanaka converts, with both groups well-represented in

¹¹ Ibid., 24-35.

the kingdom's ministries, a number of common practices enjoyed in pre-contact Hawai'i, including Hula, various sports, and religious activities were banned or informally discouraged to further the acculturation of the Kanaka and their state. The most extreme examples of this phenomenon are the banning of Hula for much of the nineteenth century (which was of questionable effectiveness) and a *de facto* ban on Hawaiian-language instruction in the archipelago's schools strongly encouraged by pro-assimilation figures in and around the "planter" cabal's government following the usurpation of Liliuokalani.¹² Despite such attempts at oppression and subsumption of Hawai'i's Indigenous culture, agents of empire also introduced new means on intellectual resistance and preservation to the islands.

Literacy was a priority for missionaries, who worked to formulate a written form of the (previously alphabetic) Hawaiian language (very poorly, as will be discussed) in order to more easily spread religious doctrine and lessons throughout their mission field. They established schools to educate Native people in a Western style, emphasizing written forms of the English and Kanaka languages. Many instructors also worked with Hawaiian students and community partners to translate Western and Kanaka histories, poetry, and fiction into written 'Olelo Hawai'i, with some teams working to produce anthologies of Indigenous narratives, legends, and fables, some of which, along with

¹² Chang, David A., *The World and All the Things Upon It: Native Hawaiian Geographies of Exploration*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2016, 105-106, Silva, Noenoe K. *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007, 144-145.

other topics relevant to the islands and their culture, were published serially in local newspapers.¹³

Many compilations of written Kanaka history from the period of colonization and annexation were heavily influenced by Western norms and virtues, with missionaries and other Euro-American officials acting as editors, commissioners, and censors for a majority of those published in newspapers or otherwise by local presses.¹⁴ Due to wealth and resource control allowing them to own or serve in administrative capacities for such enterprises, along with the imposition of Western standards for content and conduct throughout Hawai‘i due to the (often reluctant) cooperation of government, such imperial moralists were able to ensure that the most common written depictions of the Kanaka past were plainly critical. Indigenous rulers, practices, and especially religious attitudes of the past were portrayed as backwards at best and outright horrific at worst (with pre-contact Kanaka being falsely accused of, among other things, mass infanticide and possession of potent “death magic” that formed the foundation of their spiritual praxis) were routinely panned, even in accounts ostensibly written by Native people. The same literary organs used to desecrate Hawai‘i’s past were also engaged in the usurpation of its present; newspapers (such as Henry Parker’s *Ka Hoku Loa* and Armstrong and Fuller’s *Ka Hae Hawaii*) controlled by Western interests regularly championed anti-Indigenous movements in culture and government as beneficial for the realm’s people, and

¹³ Ibid., 58-79.

¹⁴ Renowned Kanaka historians Samuel Kamakau, David Malo, and John Papa I‘i all worked with and published works through missionary institutions.

opponents of Westernization were often criticized in the same spaces—spaces which often purported to speak for Hawaiians.¹⁵

The imperials' introduction and encouragement of literacy did not only serve their intended ends, however; it also provided Kanaka people a new outlet for their knowledge and identity. While Western concerns controlled a substantial share of Hawai'i's newspapers in the late nineteenth century, some were published and edited by Kanaka or more tolerant Euro-American allies, who worked to publish less explicitly warped textual records of Indigenous history and art. While the overwhelming moral and cultural impositions of imperial crusaders caused even these accounts to be somewhat compromised and presented in styles inspired by the West, they nonetheless served as crucial vehicles for positive expressions of Kanaka identity, reflections on a proud Kanaka past, and criticism of increasingly-heavyhanded imperial activity within the islands. Silva cites newspapers specifically as critical outlets of Indigenous resistance and response during the late monarchical period, otherwise characterized by Western interests placing increasing amounts of pressure on the people and government of Hawai'i to surrender their autonomy to American and European partners.¹⁶

Text also provided a medium for Kanaka thinkers and activists to communicate with broader audiences and tell their own stories. Famously, Hawai'i's penultimate ruler, the amiable and artistic Kalakaua, used the tools of literacy to create an enthralling anthology of Native mo'olelo (histories, stories, myths, and/or legends), published in the English

¹⁵ Ibid., 56-63.

¹⁶ Ibid., 51-59.

language.¹⁷ The king, a champion of soft power and Kanaka cultural enthusiast and preservationist, reacted to Western pressure in part with a veritable international hearts and minds campaign, promoting exhibitions of Native hula (which he repealed the prohibition of), song, and story, intended to demonstrate the intellectual rigor, diversity, and dignity of the kingdom's people to wider audiences and legitimize both the Hawaiian people and their state to imperial audiences. His successor and sister Liliuokalani, whose reign was marked by open conflict with foreign conspirators, also used the medium of text to record her experiences and make her case for the restoration of Hawai'i's crown through a short autobiography published in English after her overthrow.¹⁸ This was, obviously, a more explicit case of Indigenous resistance, but similar to Kalakaua's it provided audiences, Native and imperial, with access to positive portrayals of Indigeneity and Kanaka narratives writ large.

Obviously, the press was not introduced to Hawai'i to assist in resistance against assimilation or to promote Indigenous memory and values—just the opposite—but the examples above indicate that it was nonetheless engaged to those ends by resourceful and expressive activists and governors. While the examples outlined above did nothing to ultimately prevent the uprising which deposed Kanaka rulers and replaced them with Western brigands, eventually to be supplanted by a territorial government from the United States, they did demonstrate that an intellectual resistance remained strong within Kanaka society—and would continue to persist throughout a period of further

¹⁷ Kalakaua, *The Legends and Myths of Hawai'i: The Fables and Folk-Lore of a Strange People*, Mutual Publishing, Honolulu, Hawai'i, 1990.

¹⁸ Liliuokalani, *Hawai'i's Story by Hawai'i's Queen*, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1898, Reprinted Middletown, Delaware, 2020.

suppression enacted by American governors and agents. By the late nineteenth century, English was the only language allowed in many of Hawai‘i’s recognized schools, and regulated curricula mandated the use of instructional materials predicated upon an American epistemology; one which was culturally and morally Euro-centric, placed the United States at the physical and figurative center of the world, and peripheralized Indigenous Hawaiians and their home, despite being intended for *their* instruction.¹⁹ This, too, encouraged a unique form of resistive engagement; Indigenous educators wishing to better serve their students or provide them with a pedagogy more accessible and applicable to them used said materials, but did so with a heavy interpretative lens which provided Kanaka- and Hawai‘i-centric context throughout lessons wherever possible.²⁰ In the early decades of the century, Kanaka people, and Kanaka educators particularly, strove to preserve and advance an Indigenous culture in the midst of a period of imperial pressure to assimilate and dispense with their Native identity and premises, but they were certainly fighting against a current, as law and social stressors had encouraged many to abandon or devalue the Indigenous knowledge they inherited from their communities and families. This problem would necessitate a great deal of Hawaiian rediscovery to prevent many fields of Kanaka intellectual culture from dying out entirely throughout the twentieth century, and passionate, lifelong activist-scholars like John Holt and Charles Kenn were exactly the agents such a project called for.

¹⁹ It should be noted here that at some texts published for use in Kanaka schools at this time did include dedicated material on the Hawaiian Islands, but often discussed in a peripheral context, or in an iniquitous contrast to Western realms which served as the foci of narrative and pedagogy alike.

²⁰ Chang, David A., *The World and All the Things Upon It: Native Hawaiian Geographies of Exploration*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2016, 133-153.

What follows is a brief working glossary of certain Hawaiian terms and phrases which will appear frequently throughout the remainder of this document.²¹

Hawaiian Glossary

- Akua: Spirits (not quite analogous to Western conceptions of gods, though they are often interpreted as such) embodied and active within Hawai‘i’s lands, customs, and people. Many are associated with specific geographic features or phenomena, while others are associated with individual rites, activities, communities, or families. Also have been argued as deliberate human constructs intended to sequester and anthropomorphize (for lack of a better term) facets of a more gestalt, omnipresent spiritual consciousness.
- ‘Aina: Land.
- Ali‘i: A noble or elite person, understood to possess inchoate spiritual power and authority by nature of their genealogy. There are many classes of ali‘i, each afforded a distinct form and measure of cultural, religious, and/or political legitimacy and influence in pre-contact Hawai‘i. While virtually all pre-contact authorities were tied to the lineages of ali‘i, being ali‘i did not necessarily afford one much temporal power; their number was vast, and one therefore could not expect all of them to rule physical realms, with many instead holding cultural and religious *significance* without *unchecked* authority.

²¹A note on formatting: In the interest of normalizing the use of ‘olelo Hawai‘i (Hawaiian language), and in accord with many texts on Kanaka topics by Kanaka authors published of late, I will not be italicizing its terms as they appear.

- Hula: Refers to a variety of dance styles commonly performed in Kanaka society, often infused with spiritual power or contextual meaning.
- Kahuna: Most commonly used to describe priests of Kanaka religious orders, but can also refer to any type of trained expert or professional.
- Kanaka Maoli: True/Real Hawaiian. Along with the simple “Kanaka,” probably the most popular term used to describe Indigenous Hawaiians within Indigenous discourse.
- Kuleana: Responsibility, authority, right, or ability (to do something legitimately). Also used to describe certain parcels of land afforded some Kanaka people following Kamehameha III’s “Great Mahele (division)” campaign of the mid-nineteenth century.
- Kupuna: Elder, or other respected community members whose actions merit emulation. In Hawaiian English, the affectionate accolades “aunt” and “uncle” are used for venerated persons to the same effect.
- Mo‘oku‘auhau: Genealogy. An incredibly important phenomenon in Kanaka communities, as the accurate preservation and recitation of mo‘oku‘auhau (recorded for families, environmental features, and deities alike) was a principal vector of legitimization for ali‘i and kahuna in pre-contact Hawai‘i. Perhaps the most well-known mo‘oku‘auhau today is the Kumulipo, the genealogical chant used by the Kalakaua family to assert their right to Hawai‘i’s throne; it presented a family tree stretching from the birth of the world itself to King Kalakaua, without any unaccounted years.
- Mo‘olelo: A term which can variously mean history, story, legend, or myth.

- ‘Olelo Hawai‘i: Hawaiian (Kanaka) language. ‘Olelo, used in isolation, can mean “language” or “to speak.”

Chapter I: John Dominis Holt- Remembering the Kingdom

In 1962, Hawai‘i had not yet seen its second cultural renaissance, but processes were clearly at work to share and raise awareness of Kanaka Maoli issues, arts, and intellectual works. This was evident at the 75th anniversary celebration for the Kamehameha Schools, an expansive and prosperous private education system for Native youth originally established with a mandate to drive its charges towards Westernization, cultural assimilation, and technical labor for Euro-American industries—“for their own good,” of course. By 1962, however, the disposition of the schools and their attitudes towards the Indigeneity they were tasked with nurturing had shifted, evidenced by their recruitment of Kanaka author and public intellectual John Dominis Holt to give a lecture at the anniversary ceremony. Before an audience of Hawai‘i’s most influential policymakers, educators, and, most importantly, scores of Indigenous children enrolled in the schools, he provided a message wholly antithetical to the system’s original intent.

Rather than extoling the virtues of modernization or the benefits of Western-backed industrialization, or providing a safe and bland message on the merits of education (a perennial favorite of the reluctant orator at academic functions), he elected to speak to those gathered about themselves. He profiled each of Hawai‘i’s monarchs, providing brief snapshots of life in the kingdom prior to its overthrow by the planters’ conspiracy. He was complimentary of those rulers who acted in favor of cultural preservation and heritage, and spoke candidly of those instances where capitulation to Western forces deleteriously affected the kingdom. Holt’s speech encouraged Kanaka youth to be proud

of their shared past and those elements of culture, virtue, and purpose which were inchoate in them and their families, and thus did not need to be bestowed by Western pedagogy or industry. While such may be an excessively radical way to interpret his rather relaxed oration, the context of its delivery—in an institution which partnered with Western intellectual actors to suppress Indigeneity generations earlier—demonstrated a considerable sea change in Kanaka discourse and recognition in the mid-twentieth century. Such a shift was possible only by the efforts of dedicated Indigenous professionals like Holt to rediscover and celebrate Hawai‘i’s Native past and present.

When setting out to research the topic which sits at the heart of this paper currently gracing your screen, I could not have been more overwhelmed. How, exactly, was a haole from rural Tennessee to write something of unique import concerning a people, place, and time he has never known? I knew only that I was fascinated by Hawai‘ian epistemology and sociopolitical history, and that the broad, reductive paradigms often engaged by contemporary scholars of Indigeneity seemed far too simple to describe what I had read about the state of Kanaka identity and experience in the twentieth century. Such a hunch may be helpful for forming a research question (and it was!), but did nothing to assist me in actually understanding the complex, shifting world of Hawai‘ianness I wished to articulate. I could not have found a better guide through my early inquiries than John Dominis Holt IV.

Holt was not, perhaps, the figure one would imagine if asked to sketch the life of a champion of Indigenous culture. A devoted and voracious consumer of Western European fine art in all its forms, he could recall from the depths of memory minor

factoids regarding characterization in late nineteenth-century French novels decades after his first encounters with them. He idolized Marcel Proust for the author's ostensibly-trenchant narrative treatment of what Holt perceived as the quintessence of human nature across several popular works, spoke French, German, and Russian to varying extents, and, by his own admission, was naturally drawn to the theatres, galleries, and literary circles where the fine arts of imperial Europe (thus, those aesthetic products produced overwhelmingly by and for the elites of global empire) more than any other artistic setting, and certainly above Hawai'i's analogues. Interviewed for the public television program *Spectrum* in 1984, Holt spoke with a striking, resonant voice, faintly flavored with the Received Pronunciation accent commonly associated with British royalty and broadcasters. However, he was Hawai'ian, born into a family severely affected by the overthrow of Liliuokalani not three decades after the coup. A deeply pensive man, prone to (thankfully textual) rumination on all aspects of life and the wider world with which he concerned himself, Holt dedicated a great deal of time to pondering what, exactly, his identity as a Kanaka and/or as a Hawai'ian meant for him in a world increasingly distant, chronologically and ideologically, from the last days of the Hawai'ian Kingdom. He also thought and spoke at length about what that same meaning could bear for others, within and without the Kanaka nation.

Holt is easily one of the most renowned sources of knowledge concerning the Kingdom of Hawai'i's history, aristocracy, material culture, and customs to emerge in the twentieth century. His accessible writing style, passion for the injection of personal information and commentary into his more academic works, and extensive engagement with Indigenous sources of knowledge in a time when such would be extensively

scrutinized by Western academic settings allowed him to reach audiences around the world with vibrant scenes of pre-overthrow Kanaka art, society, and personhood. The immense respect rightly afforded him as a kupuna concerned with the preservation of Kanaka culture and identity, coupled with a voluminous output across decades of public writing, oration, and composition, has made Holt one of the more frequently-cited and analyzed Hawai‘ian contributors to Indigenous literary canons. All of this is to say that my aim for this chapter is not to provide a bold, heretofore-unimagined insight regarding his epistemology, identity, or stance on Hawai‘ianness which has thus far eluded all academic consideration. Rather, our goals here are simply to extract from Mr. Holt’s portfolio his stance on and definition of Hawai‘ianness and those factors he identified as substantial threats to Indigenous culture and community in Hawai‘i. Of course, I am also interested in what he suggested to remove or mitigate the same problems, and what, exactly, the Hawai‘ian cultural landscape he experienced throughout his life looked like. The following analysis will be broadly divided in twain, with one section analyzing Holt’s popular essays which explicitly addressed political, social, and cultural themes, and the other focusing on his more personal works, centered on self and family, which nonetheless still serve as invaluable windows into early twentieth-century Hawai‘ian life, if a very privileged aspect of it. The reason for this division is largely structural. The essays present, in brief but thorough style, Holt’s stances on topics of particular interest to this project, such as the author’s understanding of Hawai‘ian identity and society, how they understand the same to have informed their identity and that of their community, how they understand them to have changed over time, the place they hold each should play in influencing the Kanaka and a wider Hawai‘ian community in an ever-changing

world, and what factors they believed proved most disruptive to Indigenous identity during and after colonization. His stances are laid out very clearly in each, as are the prescriptions for a better Hawai‘i and best practices for Kanaka cultural preservation he derived from the same. What Holt’s more autobiographical texts provide to an understanding of his thought, in large part due to the unguarded, tangent-prone prose adopted within, is a clear personal context for the development of his stances. He frequently shares experiences, inherited stories, and observations from his early life and the lives of his many loving relatives which shaped his perception of self, community, identity, and indigeneity for life. This personal insight will be invaluable in understanding *why* Holt felt, thought, and acted as he did in relation to his Indigenous community and identity, as well as identifying those strains of thought and societal institutions which had considerable impacts on his intellectual evolution throughout life. Prominent themes will recur in both sections of the following analysis, but, as aforementioned, presentations of stance and personal context concomitant with each will often be separated.

What We Think About Ourselves: The Political Essays of John Dominis Holt

The two works assigned primacy in this section’s analysis, *Monarchy in Hawaii* and the seminal classic *On Being Hawaiian*, are short essays which each speak to the author’s stances on Kanaka history and cultural heritage, best practices for maintenance of the same, and lessons regarding them he wished to transmit to younger generations. They were originally penned by Mr. Holt in the mid-1960s, and both are recognized as having considerable influence on the emergence of the Second Hawai‘ian Renaissance near the end of the same decade. As a result of their cultural significance and popularity among

diverse audiences, each was reprinted numerous times by local presses in the decades following their original issue, though with no substantive differences in the principal bodies of text; subsequent editions featured unique additions such as illustrations, photographs, and forewords not originally packaged with the essays.

Monarchy In Hawaii was conceived as an oration delivered at a ceremony sponsored by the prestigious, wealthy, and eminently influential Bishop Estate in celebration of its Kamehameha Schools' 75th anniversary. While the text is largely comprised of a breezy, elegant evaluation of nearly a century of dynastic rule over the islands, Holt, doubtless aware that his audience was comprised of largely Native people attending or associated with Native schools, also took ample time to reflect on the impact of cultural and political colonization on Hawai'ian society, the modern utility of moral lessons gleaned from the annals of Indigenous royalty, and the ways in which their shared political history could inform the prospects of contemporary Kanaka people. *On Being Hawaiian*, by contrast, is both more immediately political and concerned with the creation of a product which could be immediately, practically useful for its audience—in this case, a hybrid lay audience of Native and non-native peoples. A passionate, well-argued call for Hawai'ian people to study, practice, and assert their sociocultural and aesthetic heritage, the essay also provides a relatively candid sense of what the author believed were the largest threats to Kanaka culture and intellect in the mid-twentieth century. Taken collectively, the two pieces allow us to understand the sort of problems Holt identified, and solutions he suggested to Hawai'ian readers in the wake of annexation and militarization of their home.

While Holt rarely wrote at great length about Hawaiian colonization and struggles for cultural autonomy in a global sense, *On Being Hawaiian* provides a rare instance where he found the perspective meritorious. Lauding the urge for cultural study and collective rediscovery of self demonstrated by some younger Kanaka (exactly the type of introspection and curiosity about the collective past he adored and wished to instill in his readers), Holt compares their actions to similar journeys of intellectual rediscovery being undertaken *en masse* by Native Americans, African Americans, and colonized peoples in Asia and Africa.²² It was not uncommon for him to consider Hawaiian consciousness and identity, along with actions taken related to the same, in a broader Polynesian context, but comparison along a global scale certainly was unusual within his portfolio. The presence of such within his most political, prescriptive work is a matter of common sense; the high-profile state- and nation-building dialogues ongoing within colonized communities at the time shared many goals, sovereignty over land and some measure of unimpeachable autonomy chief among them, and all treated with the ideological problems and material institutions of empire, albeit in different forms.

Holt was deeply troubled by the enduring impact of a generation-spanning disconnect from Indigenous knowledge, culture, and history engineered in Hawai‘i by its (predominantly missionary) Western colonizers. Coupled with more material concerns over the loss of lands, legal recognition, and familiar institutions, Holt indicted said disconnect for a plethora of problems plaguing the Kanaka communities he was raised within, and lived alongside as an adult. These problems were all really problematic

²² Holt, John Dominis. *On Being Hawaiian*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1995, 9.

responses to the arbitrary imposition of Euro-American systems and norms. They included overeager abandonment of Indigenous culture and reinvention of the self in attempts to acculturate to imperial societies as quickly as possible and the cultivation of excessive bitterness and hostility towards all foreigners and Western-aligned/ambivalent Kanaka in the wake of significant losses. He also noted an epidemic of depression and anxiety, across generational and class boundaries. In the case of the wealthy aristocracy among whom Holt was reared, this manifested often as reckless indulgence in vice, with alcohol, carousing, and an endless succession of extravagant banquets and salons allowing the former rulers of the isles, whom had lost so much, so quickly, to lose themselves in an occluding veil of pleasure while their communities crumbled and forgot themselves. This last reaction, for which Holt reserves a particularly potent venom, is a privileged variant of what the author considered the single greatest problem facing Kanaka cultural continuity from within the community: apathy. Holt writes at length and with vigor against those Kanaka who, despite possessing knowledge of pre-colonial histories, traditions, and mores, elected not to promulgate them throughout their households due to a belief that to do so was effectively pointless; that the haole had rendered it all bereft of practical utility or aesthetic merit by their invasion and particularly by the missionaries' dedicated campaign of reeducation and erasure. That people who inherited significant knowledge from their kupuna would willingly discard it and allow its destruction when such was eminent by the 20th century perplexed and angered him, but he offers potential explanations for such behavior repeatedly throughout

his body of work nonetheless.²³ His most commonly-depicted explanation is tied to the inexorable trauma of sudden loss; some people who lost their land, loved ones, country, and economic prosperity all at once appear to have voluntarily engaged with vice, exhaustion of their remaining resources in the pursuit of pleasurable distraction, or any number of vicious coping mechanisms he viewed as unhealthy to the individual and the community alike. According to Holt, this is precisely why his own mother allied herself with a radical, revivalist, charismatic church during his childhood; she explicitly told her son that the church was all she had left following the loss of much of her family's wealth, and that fanatical investment in it and its activities were all that gave her a sense of purpose.²⁴ If the cited passages are any indication, Holt's mother was invested in the church to such an extent not because she sincerely believed its tenets and prescriptions *with great zeal* (though that she believed is not in question here), but because she had come to view all other premises which had grounded her epistemology (many of which, as we will see, were tied to Kanaka culture) were useless.

In all of Holt's works which address the problem of Indigenous apathy, it is closely correlated, if not outright equated, with another epistemic problem common to students of empire: shame. The issue of Native shame—of colonized peoples being indoctrinated, induced, or coerced to view their culture, institutions, ways of life, etc. as inherently inferior or morally impure compared to the European analogues that were being “offered” by colonizers—is prolific within the modern scholarship of indigeneity.²⁵ That victims of

²³ *Ibid.*, 7-8, 15.

²⁴ Holt, John Dominis. *Recollections: Memoirs of John Dominis Holt*. Honolulu: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1993, 103-105, 223

²⁵ Shame and Indigenous scholarly responses to it are integral to narratives advanced in, as examples:

imperial ideology can be elicited to discard their own culture by even soft-power actors (such as evangelists) is well documented, and such practices were quite common in the South Pacific. So too were the visceral outcomes of protracted moral, intellectual, and epistemic trauma on Native peoples. Holt ascribes not only the epidemic of apathy he noted amongst Kanaka people in his environs, but also the deadly “Oku’u Phenomenon” of the late nineteenth century, to an externally-imposed sense of shame over Kanaka identity and society.²⁶ The problem and danger of shame is explored in greater length in Holt’s memoirs, and such will be analyzed in the second major section of this chapter, but his prescribed actions for addressing them are presented clearly and repeatedly in the political essays currently under evaluation.

Holt’s altar call is simple: Native Hawaiians should call themselves and each other to *take pride*—in themselves, their unique culture and heritage, their families, and the incredible things they can offer the wider world—and to *learn* from and about those Hawaiians who came before them. Despite his grave evaluation of cultural and political imperialism on twentieth-century Kanaka society, his outlook on the prospects of said society and its people was incredibly positive and hopeful. *On Being Hawaiian* argues

Hau’ofa, Epeli. *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2008.

Morton, Helen. *Becoming Tongan: an Ethnography of Childhood*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai’i Press, 1996.

Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance*. S.I.: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2017.

Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Dunedin, N.Z.: Otago University Press, 2012.

²⁶ A rash of disease and mass death among the Kanaka population. Holt attributes it, in part, to scores of people feeling so battered and eroded following generations of socioeconomic hardship and missionary assault on identity that their physical health was deleteriously affected.

(Holt, John Dominis. *Monarchy in Hawaii*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Ku Pa’a Pub., 1995, 14-16.)

that the greatest means by which Native people could assure the survival of, and reap benefits from, pre-contact culture and praxis needn't be fought from the grip of entrenched imperial institutions, but rather recovered and restored from within the Indigenous community itself. As a lay expert on monarchical Hawaiian history and its notable personae, Holt stresses the import of Kanaka people proudly inquiring after their heritage among kupuna, and of the elders freely sharing what they know with their juniors. This, it is argued, would allow Native knowledge to survive internally in an age where imperial institutions devalue, but do not actively seek to *exterminate*, the same.²⁷

John Holt was first and foremost interested in seeing heritage preserved through beautiful, approachable art. He was a lifelong admirer of arts of any sort, with a particular fondness for Western fine arts and Hawaiian material culture. The author of an illustrated compendium of pre-coup traditional feathercrafts used by Kanaka notables, he never failed to urge readers to appreciate the aesthetic beauty of the Hawaiian world; doing so was, in fact, a cornerstone of his strategy for Indigenous survival. An author talented in vivid description first and foremost, Holt consistently inundated his audience with stunning prose outlining the song, poetry, ritual performances, sculpture, woodwork and featherwork of the archipelago, and on more than one occasion argued that they could and should be appreciated and preserved by Native and foreign audiences alike on their artistic merit alone; even those opposed to or apathetic towards their symbolism

²⁷ Ibid., ix, 1, 9-10,
Holt, John Dominis. *On Being Hawaiian*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1995, 8-10, 21.

(missionaries and other agents of cultural imperialism, for instance) should be able to recognize aesthetic beauty, and easily be opposed to its dismissal or destruction.²⁸

While Holt's assertion of Indigenous righteousness, virtue, and worth are vociferous, and rightly so, his writing is also possessed of a personal, relatively pragmatic perspective on the multiplicity of moralities, epistemologies, and praxes that are held within any society or community. Perhaps informed by his multicultural upbringing and great deal of pride in virtually all of his ancestors, Holt is as sympathetic to *individual* haoles as any proponent of Kanaka cultural sovereignty I have encountered, including the relatively pro-assimilation George Kanahale. Exhibiting a sense of moral nuance usually absent from more Manichean theoretical discourses surrounding Indigeneity (e.g. usually pro-imperial Modernization models or pro-Indigenous radical resistance paradigms), Holt's stance was that no one individual or group, Kanaka or haole, held a monopoly on good or ill intent or action. While writing from the perspective of a Kanaka person on *behalf* of Kanaka people victimized by marginalizing, dehumanizing epistemic doctrines sourced from imperial heartlands, he persistently avoided the reductionist rhetoric common within such debates, and asserted the existence of good people within bad systems, and vice-versa.²⁹ His stance, placing moral judgement and culpability upon problematic institutional practice, structure, and protocol, bears a slight resemblance to contemporary paradigms for the address of structural inequities.

²⁸ Ibid., 14, 21.

²⁹ Ibid., 16.

Holt's essays also examined the distinct, existential difference between colonizer and colonized as they appeared to him. Prominent in his commentary is the theme of physical removal from a homeland as an insulator—a type of armor—for colonials. While he invokes it and similar concepts with a universal positivity elsewhere, he posits a potential downside to Kanaka aloha 'aina—a love of the land seen as a spiritual, tangible bond between the people and environment—as something of a millstone in regard to colonization, as some Kanaka (Holt himself included, it is implied) saw this foundational link shattered by displacement, invasion, intrusive development and acculturation. How could a people sustain their loving bond with the living world they inhabit if they already fought for it, and lost?

This question is at the heart of the chief distinction Holt drew between the stakes and epistemic viewpoints posed to both colonizers and the peoples they colonized; while colonizers, far afield from the homeland, institutions, and communities that defined them, fought for conquest or spoils, and the metropole often suffered no greater penalty than a loss of resources if they were unsuccessful, the colonized, challenged, displaced, and indoctrinated in their homes, faced an absolutely eschatological conflict in the wake of invasion. In the colonial Pacific, no vessels could bring Indigenous peoples additional souls to replace those lost, no courts would restore their homes to them, and no medical personnel would arrive to address the pain of generations of horrific spousal and child abuse borne out of zealous missionaries' desire to instruct their charges in “proper” assertion of authority.³⁰ Indigenous peoples like the Kanaka, when in conflict with

³⁰ Morton, Helen. *Becoming Tongan: an Ethnography of Childhood*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996, 174-214,

imperial invaders, stood, at best, to sustain their societal status quo if they repelled their opponents, though not without significant material losses. However, everything they lost to conquest—land, communities, ideologies, and institutions—were seen as, effectively, lost forever, as Holt frames the situation. He described the Kanaka of his time as epistemically shackled to a lost land, reduced to an underclass in their own world while imperials, far removed from the metropole in a territory they dominated, were likewise *freed* from epistemic shackles of their own cultures, able to do as their power afforded with minimal opposition or cognitive dissonance within colonial cadres.³¹

Holt remained consistent in his advocacy for discourse and scholarship based on Indigenous knowledge throughout his life, and his essays provide excellent examples of the ways in which he incorporated this cause into his own methodologies. Most directly, Holt was a prolific invoker of Kanaka sources, including oral accounts, folklore, genealogies, material culture, and song, using each to inform his Hawaiian histories. It was particularly significant that he did so with such success in the early 1960s, as few Western academics of the time would have easily embraced research based largely on nondocumentary sources, or those produced by non-Western peoples according to non-Western systems of knowledge. While certain fields within the Western academy have very slowly grown more comfortable with admitting a broader range of source material and recognizing the legitimacy of Native sources, Holt's work would be remarkable even today for its open, non-skeptical approach to various forms of Indigenous knowledge as

Tomlinson, Matt. *God Is Samoan: Dialogues between Culture and Theology in the Pacific*. Honolulu: Center for Pacific Island Studies, School of Pacific and Asian Studies, University of Hawai'i, Mānoa, 2020, loc. 1298-1667 (e-book).

³¹ Holt, John Dominis. *On Being Hawaiian*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1995, 17-18.

the basis for a narrative as written by a Western-educated practitioner.³²The author also spent a good deal of time within each of his more introductory works explaining and disproving Western falsehoods about Kanaka people and culture (including the notion that pre-contact society was plagued with indolence, licentiousness, human sacrifice, and cruelty) using both Western and Native sources. He noted that many of said falsehoods had been publicly debunked prior to his time of publication, some repeatedly, and yet they persisted in circulation through academic and lay presses and oratory circuits. To Holt, that people wanted to believe Native culture was inferior to its imperial analogues was a drive completely removed from evidence, as substantial evidence against such narratives did nothing to dissuade them, or the ostensibly-ethical notables who promulgated them.³³ This remains a significant problem in Hawaii through the present, as it happens. Modern Kanaka scholars report academic programs and popular authors in the islands continuing to assert some of the same false narratives concerning Natives and colonization that Holt challenged, decades later.³⁴

Along with dispelling negative falsehoods about Kanaka history, Holt's essays also take ample time to celebrate the numerous accomplishments of pre-contact and pre-coup Hawaiian society. The strides Native people made in fields as varied as navigation, maritime construction, agriculture, and astronomy are celebrated, as are the remarkably

³² Holt, John Dominis. *Monarchy in Hawaii*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1995, ix, 2, 17-18.

Holt, John Dominis. *On Being Hawaiian*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1995, 14, 19.

³³ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁴ Silva, Noenoe K. *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007, 2-6, 9

Trask, Haunani-Kay. *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005, 18, 161, 168, 177-8.

complex social mores and institutions that ensured group cohesion. While his status as a noble may have been an influence on his personal interpretation, Holt's claims that pre-contact society saw a great deal of harmony between ali'i and maka'ainana in Hawaii is extensively supported by broader scholarship. Of course, given the author's personal tastes, discourse on the merit of pre-imperial aesthetics and art dominate Holt's praises for Kanaka society and culture.³⁵

Going beyond highlighting positive aspects of an occluded Kanaka past then still within reach, Holt also dedicated space in each essay to educating his audience about the history of the islands more generally. As one may expect, *Monarchy in Hawaii* includes far more material in this vein than *On Being Hawaiian*, with often brief but comprehensive analyses of the reigns and unsurprisingly, Holt reserves his greatest praise for those monarchs who he perceived as upholding traditional practice and institutions to some extent, and more critical observations for those he deemed overly fond of rampant Westernization and the concept of imperial thralldom. Thus, while his portrayal of rulers such as Kamehameha I³⁶ and Liliuokalani³⁷ were glowing, and Kalakaua's evaluation³⁸ somewhat mixed, his lecture fulminated the hedonism, contempt for cultural protocol, and willingness to sacrifice the wellbeing and autonomy of Kanaka people exhibited by Kamehameha II.³⁹

³⁵Eg. Holt, John Dominis. *On Being Hawaiian*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1995, 14, 16.

³⁶ Holt, John Dominis. *Monarchy in Hawaii*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1995, 6-10.

³⁷ Ibid., 34-36.

³⁸ Ibid., 28-34.

³⁹ Ibid., 10-12, 15.

Another prominent theme which should be apparent at this point is the author's great animosity towards co-opted Kanaka working against their collective best interest and survival in the service of Western institutions and mores. While records and testimony show that co-optation often involved complex navigation of survival and prosperity for Native people, and was not always voluntary, Holt viewed the apparent ease with which Kanaka people participated in the erasure of their own culture with understandable rancor. Just as Holt furnishes ample criticism on the culturally-apatetic Kanaka of his day and self-concerned figures willing to sacrifice and imperil a people and their heritage, such as Kamehameha II, his portfolio also bristles with venom directed at those Native *intellectuals* whose output was flavored with uncritical acceptance of the negative stereotypes of Kanaka people and pre-contact culture outlined previously. While he praises the overall bodies of work presented by late-nineteenth century Hawaiian authors such as Samuel Kamakau and experienced genealogist David Malo, chiefly for their arrangement, considerable preservation of some particulars of the Kanaka past, and his own fond remembrances of time spent with said texts as a youth, Holt is also rather quick to chastise them (and Malo in particular) for playing a role in the promulgation of and, as Native people, offering legitimacy to, abhorrent lies about the Kanaka formulated in the minds of Euro-American prelates and scholars. While deeply troubled by the thematic content of such works and their commentary, Holt doesn't ascribe blame *solely* onto Native Kanaka writers; he postulates that the canons they wove, as they were routinely subject to review from missionary supervisors who patronized the work of converted Hawaiian scholars or acted on the commands of those who did, were variously edited or deliberately written from a perspective sympathetic to haole sensibilities. Thus, he

suggests that the likes of Kamakau and Malo may *not* have seriously adhered to the beliefs regarding Kanaka people and culture outlined in their written works, but merely acquiesced to producing the most epistemically-palatable version of their narratives possible for Western audiences and overseers. Indeed, every criticism of Malo found in Holt's output is followed by both praise for the man more generally as a recorder and teacher of Kanaka history, however inaccurate, and incredibly well-justified criticism of one Sheldon Dibble, the American missionary and amateur historian who oversaw Malo's textual work, along with that of many other prominent kanaka. According to Holt's accounts, Dibble possessed a view of pre-Christian Kanaka that was, at the very best, condescending, and outright defamatory at worst; he seemed to strongly encourage his "students" to reflect his own views and theological/moral perspectives in their writing, and "corrected" those works which deviated sufficiently from them.⁴⁰

This is not to say that Holt entertained no cause save coercion or overeager editing for the creation of works so hostile to Kanaka memory by Kanaka people, however. He did believe, for instance, that erroneous claims made by Malo and others regarding widespread, ritual human sacrifice, rampant executions by cruel ali'i for minor violations of kapu, and prolific sexual depravity could have been the result of a legitimate (if not still harmful) religious conversion on the part of the authors, repulsed by their native culture and its practices, and quite receptive to missionary falsehoods. More insidiously, however, he posited that, at least according to some of the older courtiers he was raised by and around, the animus towards the old ways apparent in such works could have been

⁴⁰ Holt, John Dominis. *Recollections: Memoirs of John Dominis Holt*. Honolulu: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1993, 142-3, 197-200.

legitimate, but the result of a socioeconomic—and not religious—cleavage between the authors and their subjects. Malo, for instance, was a court genealogist and historical expert for the court of Kamehameha I, but not, to Holt’s understanding, a member of a prominent ali‘i family himself; Holt’s old courtiers suspected that some converted maka‘ainana, such as Malo, wrote defamatory falsehoods about life and religion under the ali‘i system in part due to a grudge towards the once-dominant class of the islands. Holt does not explicitly endorse such an understanding of nineteenth century Kanaka textual chroniclers himself, but that he affords it ample space in his consideration of the troubling trend of Kanaka recording and circulating missionary lies is quite telling. It is all too likely he found such an explanation, if a bit harsh on the point of his childhood interlocutors, to be *as* plausible as theories which assumed extensive missionary interference or simple ignorance and belief on the part of the authors.

The essays under consideration focus not only on rulership and the evolution of a common Indigenous identity, but also on the construction of an evaluation of the Hawaiian Kingdom’s gradual subsumption by colonial forces. Holt, demonstrating the eye for nuance which characterized much of his work (and perhaps influenced by certain aspects of his youth to be discussed in the second section of this chapter), distinguishes between the relative level of harm he felt different imperial powers to have done to Kanaka people and their state. He is, perhaps surprisingly, hesitant to charge the European empires with playing significant roles in the decline of the kingdom, but does acknowledge that cultural agents, such as missionaries and ambassadors, certainly had some influence on Native people during the nineteenth and twentieth century. However, in Holt’s eyes, the United States bore a share of the blame for the political, social, and

cultural upheaval that shook the islands which was so considerable that it rendered the shares due other major empires infinitesimal by comparison. In addition to the obvious ties the US bore to the forces immediately involved with Liliuokalani's overthrow—as Dole and his conspirators were all Hawaiian-born Americans and their efforts were supported, alternatively through action and inaction, by American military actors—Holt charges that the assiduousness and arrogance commonly exhibited by continental missionaries made their influence more harmful than that of many of their European peers.⁴¹ Citing the experiences of Kanaka notables abroad, and particularly their encounters with a spirit of persistent, if subtle, condescension in Europe and outright racism and hostility in America, Holt argues that the Kanaka were, while not commonly seen as truly equal in any imperial heartland, afforded generally *more* humanity and respect by the British and French than by the Americans. The accounts of colonized and enslaved individuals who traveled between imperial metropolises during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries appears to bear this out generally; European communities were perceived as far less abrasive or pugnacious (though, it must be stressed again, *still not bereft of prejudice*) in their conduct towards nonwhite foreigners than their American analogues.⁴²

If Holt was clear and immediate in his delivery of assessment for the strengths of twentieth century Kanaka, faults of imperial systems and epistemologies, and costs and stakes of being an Indigenous Hawai'ian in his era, what were his prescriptions for the people to and for which he wrote? Aside from calls to discontinue the careless

⁴¹ Holt, John Dominis. *On Being Hawaiian*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1995, 17-18, 21.

⁴² Holt, John Dominis. *Monarchy in Hawaii*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1995, 19-22.

dissemination of harmful falsehoods about Hawaiian people and society, and a general invitation to young people to inquire into their history and cultural heritage among their kupuna, Holt left readers with a remarkably joyous, almost utopian vision for the Hawaiian future.

John Holt IV believed incessantly in the ability of Kanaka and haole populations—of the colonized and the colonizer—to live together equitably, kindly, and happily, with no population abusing, denigrating, or working to erase the unique culture, praxis, or skills of the other. His vision of the future was centered on a Hawaii where Native people were effectively senior partners with foreign settlers, and could proudly use and exhibit their techniques for land management and preservation, and remarkable maritime achievement to pursue a less ecologically-destructive, sustainable method of development and way of life for all those who sought a home in the islands. One of the most prominent themes in his work was the celebration of Hawai‘i’s uniquely diverse, multicultural community. The archipelago’s geopolitical position allowed it to serve as a great locus of cultural osmosis and interaction—essentially a massive borderland patronized by myriad peoples from around the world—and Holt never failed to indicate the diversity of communities and the country as a whole throughout his portfolio, constantly arguing that, while the Kanaka have much to offer the wider world and deserve emancipation from harmful imperial structures of intellectual and social oppression, they could also learn and grow *alongside* foreigners, be they from Asia, Africa, or even the Euro-American empires which engineered the destruction of the Hawai‘ian Kingdom.⁴³ While perhaps overly

⁴³ Holt, John Dominis. *On Being Hawaiian*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1995, 9-10.

dismissive of systemic social problems which plagued the Kanaka of his time due to the persistence of unequal colonialist structures and policies, Holt encouraged his audience to take heart in the knowledge that many Kanaka people were able to find great social and commercial success in both the Native world and Western metropolises alike.⁴⁴ Curiously enough—and this is perhaps what differentiates Holt’s view on Indigenous autonomy and modern identity most from other prominent Kanaka writers and orators who have lately tackled the subject—the author did not advocate for the revival of an independent Kanaka state; he believed that it was destroyed irrevocably in the coup against Liliuokalani, and that Hawaiian people were best served by proudly rediscovering the social, cultural, religious, and, most of all, aesthetic pith of their heritage and lobbying for opportunities to exhibit the same on a regional or global stage. He felt that the Kanaka should be a distinct, valued member of a broader American commonwealth, should fight for recognition and treatment as such, and should use their unique epistemic outlook to positively influence policy and governance within the islands, and should preserve and transmit the heritage they could recover from their kupuna to future generations from within the Kanaka community as well as without. He did not argue that greater cultural assimilation to the American polity would not occur; rather, he speculated that, in his model, it would, but believed that Kanaka people preserving *as much of their culture as practical* at the time of writing would be able to interpret, transform, and apply it to the contexts which would result from acculturation, leading to a type of cultural metamorphosis, rather than the outright loss which campaigns of erasure, shame, and

⁴⁴ Ibid., 18-20.

disconnect nearly brought on in the early twentieth century. Holt was saddened by the knowledge that younger readers would never know the Hawai‘i he so loved as a child, but never doubted their ability to rediscover its spirit and take it forward into a beautiful new world of their making that he similarly could not imagine.⁴⁵

“They tell us we are all kinds of things, but what do we think of ourselves?”

-John Dominis Holt IV, *On Being Hawaiian*⁴⁶

Sidebar: Topgallant/Ku Pa‘a Publishing

In the mid-twentieth century, the Hawai‘ian Islands were home to a bustling bazaar of homegrown art, in the form of poetry, song, dance, physical arts, and, of course, written prose. Popularity of the latter in particular caused the funding and at least short-term success of a significant number of book publishers, printers, and sellers based in Hawai‘i. One journalist cited the archipelago as a uniquely vital market for written works due to, among other factors, the presence of a culture distinct from those anywhere else within the American political sphere, widespread curiosity about the same on the part of audiences and executives with access to materials requisite to mass-produce literature, and the physical remoteness of the islands rendering smaller publishing and distribution

⁴⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 19.

houses far more profitable than they would be competing directly against established corporate powerhouses in mainland markets.⁴⁷

As aforementioned, John Dominis Holt possessed both a deep-seated love of the written word and a vast portfolio of his own contributions to popular literature. He took part in sharing both by taking advantage of Hawai‘i’s unique textual economy as a publisher in the late 1970s, establishing Topgallant Publishing as a small, independent publisher of books intended for lay audiences. The firm took its name from a serene mountaintop retreat, something like a small estate which had been used on occasion to house foreign notables during Holt’s childhood, and the environs of which, like so much of the islands, completely ensorcelled him.⁴⁸ Topgallant traded in books on numerous topics penned by Holt and other authors until 1982, when it was renamed Ku Pa’a Publishing, Limited; I was unable to determine whether the change of appellation was concomitant with a restructuring of the company’s workforce, mission, or location (both imprints were registered in Honolulu), as information on the publisher remains frustratingly sparse. Ku Pa’a would issue new editions of titles released under the Topgallant brand, as well as a healthy volume of new works, throughout the 80s and 90s, but discontinued its business by 2001, according to public corporate records. The same records list the press’ shuttering as “involuntary”, potentially suggesting a financial or

⁴⁷ Gomes, Andrew, “Pleiades joins Hawaii’s book publishing business,” Pacific Business Journals, 1998, <https://www.bizjournals.com/pacific/stories/1998/10/26/story7.html>.

⁴⁸ Holt, John Dominis. *Recollections: Memoirs of John Dominis Holt*. Honolulu: Ku Pa’a Pub., 1993, 195-6.

administrative hardship as a cause of closure, though this is entirely speculation on my part.⁴⁹

The Topgallant/Ku Pa'a library is extremely diverse in genre, author, and intended audience, reflecting Holt's passion for sharing the aesthetic appeal and heritage of his culture(s) with the world through casual engagement and entertainment, as well as his steadfast commitment to a multiethnic Hawai'i wrought from the experience and expertise of people from across the globe. While the kupuna's own works comprised a substantial share of the portfolio, his publishing house also distributed novels, anthologies of poems and short stories, and folk histories penned by Kanaka, hapa-haole, and Euro-American authors alike. Its output even included editions of select academic works, including museum director Ernest Stanley Dodge's thrill-a-minute *Hawaiian and Other Polynesian Gourds*, which doubtless flew off of store shelves at release and continues to amuse and fascinate audiences of all ages to this day.⁵⁰ Reflecting Holt's own immense passion for visual storytelling, Topgallant/Ku Pa'a editions of his own works always included gorgeous cover art, usually paintings or sketches of prominent Hawai'ian personages or landscapes, and lengthy pictorial sections interspersed throughout the text. Said materials, when not produced by authors or associates, were often acquired through the courtesy of the Bishop Estate.⁵¹ The press and its releases

⁴⁹ Hawai'i Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs, "Ku Pa'a Publishing Records", Hawai'i Business Express, retrieved Sept. 13, 2021,

<https://hbe.ehawaii.gov/documents/business.html?fileNumber=74222D1&view=info>.

⁵⁰ Openlibrary, "Ku Pa'a Publishing Profile," retrieved Sept. 13, 2021,

https://openlibrary.org/publishers/Ku_Pa'a_Pub

Openlibrary, "Topgallant Publishing Profile," retrieved Sept. 13, 2021,

https://openlibrary.org/publishers/Topgallant_Publishing_Co.

⁵¹Eg. Holt, John Dominis. *On Being Hawaiian*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1995, 22-64,

Holt, John Dominis. *Recollections: Memoirs of John Dominis Holt*. Honolulu: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1993, 46-68,

doubtless did much to inform and fascinate audiences throughout the Western world and Oceania with their accessible, attractive presentation of distinctly Hawai‘ian topics and phenomena, raising visibility of the islands’ people and literary culture alike.

Reared in the Court of Shadows: The Personal Writings of John Dominis Holt

As previously stated, John Dominis Holt was exceptionally proud of his extended family, and wrote of them with palpable love throughout his entire career. In line with his interests in the Hawaiian past and biographical writing, many of the works he produced focused on his memories of parents, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, along with information they relayed about their own immediate ancestors. Said works largely inform the analysis presented in this section, with the only primary source assessed herein not conforming to such a range of topics being an illustrated compendium of pre-annexation Hawaiian featherwork pieces. Its inclusion here is solely due to the fact that the contents to be analyzed pertain to Holt’s views on personal and public memory, rather than the art which dominates the volume’s bulk.

Two other texts scrutinized herein merit distinct introductions. A slim booklet titled *The Art of Fredda Burwell Holt*, published under John’s own Topgallant imprint in 1975, contains just that: a collection of sketches and paintings, many of Hawaiian notables from the monarchial period, created by the author’s first wife. Its very existence is a considerable vector of insight into its creator and his view of what was important—to him and for audiences to receive exposure to. The text was published as a personal memorial

Holt, John Dominis. *Monarchy in Hawaii*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Ku Pa’a Pub., 1995, 47-68.

following Fredda's death in 1972. It is very short, and contains little text beyond a reprinted (and perhaps slightly edited) evaluation of the artist's body of work from a journalist, which serves as a foreword, and an eight-page essay by John Holt reflecting on his wife, her work, their shared experience of discovering and being fascinated by the modern Hawaiian identity and regal Kanaka past (hence the work's inclusion here), and time together in the islands and on the mainland.⁵² While I have striven to keep first-person narrative voice in this project to a minimum, I also feel an interpretive duty here to personally interject and provide some explanation of the significance of Holt's little memorial booklet.

That Holt published such a small, immensely niche piece through his own press in honor of his wife was telling. It demonstrated, beyond the author's usual zeal for sharing all things Kanaka and aesthetic with audiences, who and what were really important to him. His first wife was an artist—and given to alignment with rather esoteric artistic circles and movements, if my reading of the essay is any indication—whose output was fairly large, and deeply meaningful to her. By compiling, contextualizing, and sharing her work with the wider world, her widower was able to remember her by not only presenting it to others, but also by publicly demonstrating exactly how important she was to him and his perception of the world. To consider subjects as only aggregates of conceptually-relevant ideas, to be dissected, subjects of scholarly analysis, in a vacuum, we risk neglecting the aspects of their lives and worlds most important *to them*. In my mind, any textual analysis of John Dominis Holt's body of work which emphasizes the importance

⁵² Holt, John Dominis. *The Art of Fredda Burwell Holt*. Topgallant Pub. Co., 1975, v-7.

of ancestry and Kanakaness, but neglects the considerable love and character he demonstrated in his production of niche works about and for loved ones like Fredda is incomplete. Her work, epistemology, and presence were deeply important to both John and the wider Kanaka community. They should be to us as well.

The second notable work cited throughout this section is perhaps the densest, and most easily-recommendable of Holt's canon, in my opinion. A lengthy autobiography titled *Recollections*, it provides loosely-structured vignettes of the author's early life in Hawaii, with the majority of narrative content chronologically placed before his departure to attend college on the mainland. Content is roughly divided into two large sections, with the former comprising Holt's personal memories of childhood in early-twentieth century Hawaii, and the latter being devoted to disjoint musings on various episodes from earlier family history (including a chapter apiece focusing on each side of his genealogy) and brief musings on his life looking back from the early 1990s. The text is accessible, thorough, and, most helpful for this analysis, written in a conversational, eminently unguarded manner, with the presenter lazily drifting through anecdotes while providing the audience with detail regarding whatever they found most important about their memory at the time. It is as close as a modern student can get to receiving an oral history directly from John Holt himself, and is thus invaluable for this type of project.

The first facet of Holt's sense of identity and conception of a modern Hawaiian community delivered in *Recollections* is found in his presentative style itself. As mentioned previously, his prose tends towards rich descriptive language, with lengthy passages dedicated to the development of mental landscapes for readers' digestion. In

Recollections, this aspect of his writing is omnipresent; Holt constantly describes locations by their scent, sound, and the wildlife found in their environs, streets and houses by their architecture and upkeep (occasionally supplemented by hand-drawn maps), and individuals by the style of their dress, distinct features, ancestry and relations, and tone of voice.⁵³ From one analytical perspective, this could merely be the product of a pensive, nostalgic man wishing to paint the clearest picture possible for his audience—a picture of things he loved and which exist in this world no longer. However, it also may qualify as an example of a particular feature of Kanaka epistemology and creation of space. According to recent studies of and treatises on Native Hawaiian ways of knowing and prospective applications of the same in scholarly research, principally those published by Indigenous geographer Katrina-Ann Olivera, pre-contact concepts of location, navigation, and legitimate presentation of authority over such concepts were closely tied to the nuanced recitation of the multisensory experience of being in a place. Said studies frame an understanding of place arrived at through personal experience (i.e. *the practitioner having been at a given place*) and demonstrated through the ability to describe the natural world in the same in great detail—its visuals, inhabitants, sounds and scents—as a uniquely Kanaka way of knowing. It is important to note that while the technique and value matrix informing such a practice may not be truly without analogues elsewhere in the world,⁵⁴ some of its implications (namely that Kanaka people can easily

⁵³ Eg. Holt, John Dominis. *Recollections: Memoirs of John Dominis Holt*. Honolulu: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1993, 15-25, 46-68.

⁵⁴ Most any person, for instance, is familiar with the practice of mnemonically locating places or features by their relative position to other notable features of their environment. While the Kanaka cases described favor use of the multisensory stimuli of the natural world, readers most familiar with, for example, an American metropolis may use the relative locations of buildings, roads, and artificial landmarks to mentally map their surroundings. It could be argued that this is, *mechanically*, the same

perform such techniques in and around Hawaii thanks to a metaphysical link with the akua manifesting in and through the islands' environment) are.⁵⁵

Holt's descriptive gifts are applied most regularly to the neighborhoods and wildernesses of Hawaii he spent his childhood exploring, as well as to the richly-furnished, bustling mansions and palaces he was raised in. Understand that John Dominis Holt was a scion of a very privileged class, with family on his paternal side having possessed a great deal of land used for ranching ventures through the early twentieth century, and missionary ancestors on his maternal side having attained immense wealth through business ventures including sugar farming. Both sides of the family also bore significant, proximate ties to notable lines of ali'i, with Holt himself quite closely related to the Hawaiian royal houses.⁵⁶ As a result, he was raised in an unusually well-connected environment within post-annexation Hawaii, and was able to attain much of his knowledge regarding the islands before the coup against Liliuokalani from many of the noble houses that bore great influence in the final days of the kingdom (and which continued to exercise informal leadership roles well into Holt's life). Many of the most trenchant insights regarding the Hawaiian Kingdom and its culture found within Holt's output is contained within his memories and stories of the ali'i whose vestigial courts served as his playgrounds as a child.

practice, albeit without some of the sensory input the natural world could provide, and without the cosmological underpinnings of the Kanaka case.

⁵⁵ Oliveira, Katrina-Ann R. Kapa'anaokalaokoala Nakoa, *Ancestral Places: Understanding Kanaka Geographies*, Corvallis, Oregon State University Press, 2014, 66-72, 94-106, 112-113.

Oliveira, Katrina-Ann R. Kapa'anaokalaokoala Nakoa, "Ka Wai Ola: The Life-Sustaining Water of Kanaka Knowledge" in *Kanaka 'Oiwī Methodologies: Mo'olelo and Metaphor*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2016.

⁵⁶ Holt, John Dominis. *Recollections: Memoirs of John Dominis Holt*. Honolulu: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1993, 3-5, 30.

The sprawling manors and elegant palaces inhabited by the Hawaiian aristocracy of Holt's youth provided a basis for his vision of a multicultural, loving Hawaii; he consistently indicated to readers certain individuals who were "part-Hawaiian" (or hapa-haole, terms he used to describe persons of partial Kanaka descent).⁵⁷ The persistent assertion of such labels, often upon the aristocracy (including the royal family), could be interpreted as meeting multiple objectives for Holt. On one hand, Kanaka people are subject to classification as Native or non-Native under a United States law based on a restrictive 50 percent blood quantum criterion. It is possible that the ascription of Kanaka identity onto individuals who would not qualify as Native under the US' criteria was one motive.⁵⁸ However, it is also possible that Holt, champion of multiculturalism and fond of indicating Kanaka sociocultural and economic influence over modern Hawaii when he could, wished to inform readers that many personae named in his books, including many with European or Hispanic names, were largely or fully Kanaka. Whether to assert indigeneity regardless of external categorization or to demonstrate Native presence where it may otherwise be easily missed, Holt's referral to others as "part-Hawaiian/hapa-haole" is constant in his biographical works, and especially around the aristocracy.

His childhood experiences also demonstrate that Holt's aristocratic Hawai'i, despite being politically dominated by the United States and its military and economic adventures, was overwhelmingly British in its cultural affectation. He recalled palaces

⁵⁷ Eg. *Ibid.*, 13-15, 27-32, 109.

⁵⁸ Hall, Lisa Kahaleole, "Hawaiian at Heart and Other Fictions," *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 19 No. 2, University of Hawai'i Press, Honolulu, HI, 2005, 404-413, Trask, Haunani-Kay. *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005, 55.

built in colonial styles, furnished in accordance with the tastes of Victorian London, a great fondness for and indulgence in imperial pastimes such as Western-style theater, opera, and safari/hunting/exploitation ventures to Africa being enjoyed by many Kanaka notables of his youth. Moreover, he claimed that most of the courtiers he spent time near spoke English with a mild Received Pronunciation dialect—the British accent commonly associated with aristocracy and “proper” broadcast speech. Indeed, even Holt himself, as seen in the Spectrum interview mentioned near the outset of this chapter, spoke with a very faint English accent the likes of which knew no analogue on the American mainland!⁵⁹ According to his (relatively positive) assessment of these cultural influences, Holt’s Hawaii was not immensely acculturated to the United States—save a prominent, common love of American popular music. His and his family’s general fondness for British culture may well have contributed to Holt’s relative unwillingness to castigate European empires at length for their particular roles in Hawaiian subjugation.

The palatial homes and gardens described in *Recollections* were home to Kanaka people who seamlessly blended Western and Indigenous furnishings, art, and practices in their makeup; Holt assesses nearly every household he mentions for its exhibited Kanakaness and Europeanness, noting how one ali‘i clung very tightly to Western mores and styles, only significantly acknowledging Hawaiian tradition at large ceremonial dinners, while another of fairly equal rank adored indulging in “old-school” celebrations,

⁵⁹ Holt, John Dominis. *Recollections: Memoirs of John Dominis Holt*. Honolulu: Ku Pa‘a Pub., 1993, 43, 69, 88-89, 92, “Spectrum Hawaii; Scenes from Sandalwood Mountains; Interview with John Dominis Holt,” 1984-06-01, PBS Hawaii, American Archive of Public Broadcasting (GBH and the Library of Congress), Boston, MA and Washington, DC, accessed September 14, 2021, <http://americanarchive.org/catalog/cpb-aacip-225-93gxdb91>.

foods, and discourse. Passages outlining distinctions between such households quite comprehensively depict the various degrees of cultural synthesis present in ali‘i circles following annexation.

Holt’s childhood also provided clear examples of deleterious Western cultural mores being absorbed into Kanaka high society. As candid as he was comprehensive, the author’s writing hardly ever shied away from explicit discussions of sexual, crass, or even unpleasant episodes. In an example of content meeting all three criteria, he sadly recounted numerous times in youth that family members—many of the same kupuna whom he idolized in other contexts—harangued him for failing to meet arbitrary, Western-machismo-influenced notions of masculinity, frequently calling him by various epithets, including, most notably, a derogatory term used to describe homosexuals in ‘olelo Hawai‘i (which, itself, originated as a value-neutral word in Tahiti). The mores of missionary landholders, as they had so many other places in the Pacific world, appeared to Holt to have shaped the moral matrices of some Kanaka people—in ways that made certain among them less tolerant than was previously standard for their society.⁶⁰ While it is completely ancillary to this discussion, as Holt suffered the cruelty and insults of his kupuna for simply appearing “unmanly” as a young child, passages elsewhere in *Recollections* do describe sexual encounters with other males in adolescence and one close relationship with a male friend coded, if not explicitly stated, to be romantic. It,

⁶⁰ Holt, John Dominis. *Recollections: Memoirs of John Dominis Holt*. Honolulu: Ku Pa‘a Pub., 1993, 203-204, 207.

thankfully, does not appear that the author received nearly so much antagonism for these liaisons, according to his account.⁶¹

A considerable theme throughout Holt's personal narratives is his own journey of rediscovery—of his unusual relationship with his Indigeneity, and with the culture and history unique to his native islands. According to his account of childhood, Holt loved and sought after information on the old monarchy and Kanaka culture as a young man, but was also introduced to Western fine arts (music, theater, etc.) by his mother, who greatly appreciated them and encouraged her children to select an artistic discipline to practice in a similar style (Holt opted for music, learning to play the piano, though no serious products came of it to my knowledge). Increasingly captivated by European vocalists and classical musicians who would occasionally travel to the islands to perform, by radio broadcasts of plays and operas, and, above all, by the worlds woven by Western novelists and poets, Holt, by his own admission, grew increasingly discontented with Hawaii and its culture as a young adult, viewing them as provincial, simple, and insufficiently trenchant for his budding auteur's palate. Thusly, when he left to study in Eastern America and, later, Western Europe, he immersed himself in the artistic circles of those regions, indulging in a glut of Western high culture and humanist products.⁶² While Holt never completed a postsecondary credential, his time spent abroad for study allowed him to meet new people, including his first wife, Fredda, and begin to rediscover his love of Kanaka culture and history by sharing and exploring these things with his social circle. Combined with the relative economic freedom afforded by *very* prestigious custodial

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 192, 211-218.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 193-197, 225-230

positions at the Haiku Valley Estate, this rediscovery led the Holts to move back to the islands and lose themselves in a program of studying Kanaka heritage, genealogy, and the history of the Hawaiian Kingdom.⁶³

This leads us to another important point: Holt was, in his field of repute, effectively self-taught. Recognized as one of his time's most knowledgeable sources on Kanaka history and culture, if not *the* most knowledgeable, Holt learned nearly all he knew from informal interviews with his kupuna, extensive research in state archives, and work with and in the collections of the Kanaka estates which preserved into the twentieth century. His call for younger Kanaka to learn about their culture, and for kupuna to freely share what they knew, is understood more clearly in light of the considerable effort he and his wife invested in unearthing what knowledge they could, without much formal institutional assistance.

Holt's personal delves into Kanaka history also informed him about the costs of negligence among those who could transmit their knowledge to younger generations. In his compendium of feathercrafts, he advises readers that the objects chronicled, rich in kuleana⁶⁴ and symbolism, were not clearly interpretable to him; while the meanings and significances of certain symbols or pieces could be extrapolated from his research, Holt stresses that many, though only two or three generations had passed since their creation, bore meanings occluded to him. Valuable, unique cultural knowledge had been

⁶³ Ibid., 234-235.

⁶⁴ A Hawaiian term for "hidden meanings", encompassing a complex, evolving lexicon of double-entendres, cultural symbols, and aesthetics which evade direct interpretation; they must be understood in their context of creation to be understood at all.

irreversibly lost due to a relatively short interruption in its transmission from generation to generation. This example, more than any other, demonstrates to me how easily destructive, culturally-imperialistic forces such as missionaries and their auxiliaries were able to upset long-established mores and practices in their haunts.⁶⁵

As aforementioned, Holt's biographical writings are uniformly candid and personal. Thus, the subjects he mentions but does not consent to the provision of detail on is very small, and telling. One of the only episodes he refuses to provide much information on in *Recollections* is his very unpleasant time at the Kamehameha Schools as a youth.⁶⁶ Originally a series of three boarding schools intended to provide for technical/trade-based education for Kanaka children in accordance with the wishes of Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop, last of the legendary Kamehameha line and Hawaii's largest landowner at the time of her death. A champion of processes intended to "help" Hawaiians acclimate to Western-dominated social structures and economies, Princess Pauahi left her entire estate to the Kanaka people, intending for its worth and lands to be used as the foundation for academic institutions capable of serving—and Westernizing—all Native children. Holt shares little information about his two years in the schools, barring general descriptions of facilities and programs, an episode where nearly his entire family became engaged in a brawl with openly racist, abusive administrators (and yet left their child with the latter...), and the fact that his great aunts enrolled him under false pretenses at the urging of school governors, who suggested that their programs held only great promise for

⁶⁵ Holt, John Dominis. *The Art of Featherwork in Old Hawai'i*. Honolulu, Hawai'i: Ku Pa'a Pub, 1997, 9, 12, 20-21.

⁶⁶ Holt, John Dominis. *Recollections: Memoirs of John Dominis Holt*. Honolulu: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1993, 159-192.

young Kanaka. What is conveyed, however, is reprehensible, and evocative of the wanton cruelty and dispossession of self prevalent in continental America's "Indian boarding schools," albeit with a fortunate absence of those worst demons of the human character which, unabated, saw the mainland's schools kill so many of their charges. Holt describes military-style education for boys, haole and part-Hawaiian faculty and administrators who openly decried their Native charges as racially incapable of "proper" conduct or learning, and frequent physical abuse—torture, really—meted out to students who did not conform to an incredibly restrictive regimen of harsh, arbitrary education by one Mr. Ballinger, a decrepit battleaxe hired to oversee the boys' military exercises.⁶⁷ While Holt also briefly notes that some teachers were warm, kind, and of actual merit to their students, and some activities enjoyable, the bulk of his time at the Kamehameha Schools was so painful that even in advanced age, he did not wish to reflect on it.⁶⁸

It may seem strange, then, that Holt would go on to not only praise the later work of the schools, which have since expanded into a generally well-regarded school *system* for Kanaka children, led research into curricula and pedagogy informed by Native principles, and worked to preserve and transmit 'olelo Hawaii amongst youth. In fact, he served as one of the trustees tasked with overseeing the schools (and the entire Bishop Estate system) in the 1970's! It is possible that said service was informed by what Holt saw as a considerable improvement in the orientation, action, and service provided by the schools;

⁶⁷ Ibid., 163-172, 175-176.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 172, 187-190.

he wrote about his pleasure at seeing the institutions finally offering college preparatory classes and materials proximate to the publication of *Recollections*.⁶⁹

“There are so many other spirits and associations with places of Hawai‘i that need care and attention. The spirits seem afraid of modern people and don’t live close to them.... We would be a better people today, and have a stronger culture, if we managed to become closer to these feelings and to enjoy and appreciate what is dear to the heart. All of our riches and genius is now going to producing and inventing things aimed at dying and death, things that are so empty of joy. Our traditions must keep on going. They can be absorbed and used in a cleansing way for all people. These spirits want us to make life memorable and beautiful.

John Dominis Holt IV, *Recollections*⁷⁰

Sidebar: The Nation of Hawai‘i and the Incredible Legend of Bumpy Kanahele

One incident, referenced briefly in Holt’s memoirs, reveals little about the man himself or his stances on Indigenous Hawai‘ian identity and prospects, but still merits a brief discussion here, as it *does* allow us to encounter another Kanaka notable with a concrete view of what cultural heritage and survival should look like in a post-colonization world, and will allow me to share one of the strangest stratagems for Native perpetuation I have encountered as a neophyte researcher.

Early in *Recollections*, in a larger passage on the significance of place and ecological maintenance to both akua and Kanaka values of community, Holt briefly mentions a dialogue he participated in following what he refers to as merely “the Makapu‘u incident” in 1988. The conversation, which included prominent social leaders from the island of Oahu as well as members of the state government, saw a Catholic priest,

⁶⁹ Ibid., 179-180.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 84.

unlikely as it may sound, unite with Holt in suggesting that enduring unrest in the region could have been attributed to the neglect of local akua Mai'a Malei. They posited that the eviction or destruction of a stone sculpture that served as her physical vessel (not dissimilar to an akua hulu manu in its significance) and the general fear and hostility some Kanaka residents felt towards her and her worship following colonization and the imposition of shame upon Hawai'ian practices and mores could have impelled the akua to retreat from her lands, taking harmony with her.⁷¹ While a fascinating episode that demonstrates both the potential impact of shame and neglect of cultural tradition on Kanaka communities' mindsets and the duoverie—a willingness to at least entertain the impact of multiple spiritual traditions upon the world or localities within it—which seems to have promulgated among even Western religious leaders in the Pacific, Holt's passage mentions practically nothing about the Makapu'u incident itself, aside from its involvement of threats of violence from Kanaka activists.

The Makapu'u incident, such as it was, entailed the 1987 occupation of an Oahu lighthouse and the beach which surrounded it, one of two such occupations carried out by cadres of Kanaka sovereignty proponents, including one Dennis “Bumpy” Kanahele. The 1987 occupation itself lasted roughly two months, and was intended to assert a land claim dating back to the Kingdom of Hawai'i. Kanahele served as one of the incident's organizers, and was arrested near its conclusion in early 1988 on charges related to the unlawful possession of firearms.⁷² The Kanaka activists' operation echoed similar

⁷¹ Ibid., 84.

⁷²Independent and Sovereign Nation State of Hawai'i, *UNPFII Questionnaire to Indigenous Peoples' Organizations*, Nation State of Hawai'i, Waimanalo, HI, 2017, 1-3.

occupations carried out by members of Indigenous grassroots movements campaigning for land claims and various forms of political sovereignty in the United States throughout the early 1970s.⁷³ Despite Kanahēle's arrest and the relatively short duration of the 1987 operation, the Kanaka activists' agitation eventually bore some fruit on Oahu, as a second occupation, spanning 1993-1994, saw the state agree to lease a parcel of land in the community of Waimanalo⁷⁴ to a pro-sovereignty movement led by Kanahēle at a favorable rate.⁷⁵ On their newly-liberated lands, Bumpy and his associates established a small village which serves as the geopolitical capital of their independent Nation of Hawai'i, a council-governed microstate which claims to be the legitimate government of the Kanaka people and advocates for Indigenous causes within the archipelago while also dedicating resources to providing for the homeless, dispossessed, and disadvantaged within their surrounding communities.

While the existence of the Nation of Hawai'i is itself a compelling topic for students of Indigeneity, political science, and collective action, Mr. Kanahēle himself is the sole reason for this sidebar's inclusion herein. Once known throughout Oahu for his aggressive, obstinate acts of pro-independence advocacy (which saw him arrested and prosecuted on multiple occasions), Kanahēle has devoted recent decades to the expansion of Kanaka visibility and legal activism through myriad less confrontational means, many

⁷³ For an extremely thorough contextualization and analysis of these and other seminal episodes of modern Native resistance on the mainland presented by Indigenous cultural critics, see Warrior, Robert Allen, and Paul Chaat Smith. *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee*. United States of America: New Press (NY), 1996.

⁷⁴ An outlying, rural region of the Honolulu metropole.

⁷⁵ Nakaso, Dan, "Waimanalo land lease offers possible solution for Waianae homeless camp", *Honolulu Star Advertiser*, Honolulu, HI, 2018.

of which are, in a word, bizarre. In addition to establishing a number of well-reputed non-profits concerned with community welfare, Kanahale has worked recently as a passionate practitioner of alternative medicine, using a mechanical engine based on a specific interpretation of traditional Chinese healthcare techniques to purportedly equalize the energy levels within major organs to improve circulatory health. He has also played as himself in small roles advocating for the Nation of Hawai‘i on television’s *Hawaii Five-O* and the controversial 2015 film *Aloha*⁷⁶, dedicated a considerable amount of the nation’s land to a marijuana farm, and launched a Kanaka-themed cryptocurrency called “Aloha Coin”. All of these outlandish activities—the drugs, the aura-manipulation apparatus, the cameos, and the extremely dubious ephemeral web-currency—comprise Kanahale’s repertoire of nonviolent, cutting-edge activist tactics, each working to elevate the visibility of Kanaka people generally and the Nation of Hawai‘i specifically. Said tactics are the sole reason I have felt so impelled to share this anecdote with you, disjoint though it may be. More amazingly, *they appear to be working*, as Kanahale continues to feature in televised discussions, popup seminars, and activist summits concerning Native autonomy and independence, receive fairly frequent requests for interviews, and occasionally meet with foreign dignitaries at his village to this day.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ The film, directed by Cameron Crowe, quite rightly drew considerable ire from critics for casting a white actress as a prominent Chinese-Hawaiian character.

⁷⁷ Daysog, Rick, “Activist withdraws from Hawaiian Constitutional Convention”, *Hawaii News Now*, Honolulu, HI, 2016.

Dennis “Bumpy” Kanahale Official Website on Hawaiian Issues, “Malama First: Interviewed by Dr. Michael Klaper”, 2006, https://bumpykanahale.com/bumpy_kanahale_dr_michael_klaper_malama_first.php

Independent and Sovereign Nation State of Hawai‘i Office of the Head of State, “Executive Order 95-004: The National Monetary System Act”, Waimanalo, HI, 2015.

Udell, Joseph, “Whatever Happened to Bumpy Kanahale?”, *Honolulu Magazine*, Honolulu, HI, 2007.

Ch. I Conclusion

As should be evident, John Dominis Holt is a writer and thinker I hold in extremely high regard. A scion of a fading kingdom, he dedicated his life to learning and enjoying as much about his homeland's history as he could, and making it accessible, entertaining, and lovable to audiences the world over. Holt was a dedicated public servant, enriching Hawaii and all of her people through his masterful command of language. Accordingly, he was decorated for his body of work and cultural advocacy on multiple occasions, receiving, among other accolades, the Hawaiian Award for Literature from the state in 1985 and recognition as a Living Treasure of Hawaii by the Honpa Hongwanji Buddhist Mission in 1979.⁷⁸ He also engaged with other writers, orators and poets based out of the islands at length, frequently contributing to conferences and seminars, including Stephen Sumida's Talk Story conferences dedicated to celebrating Hawaii's multicultural literary heritage.⁷⁹

While my own evaluation of Holt and his work is positive in the extreme, I acknowledge that some facets of his output and epistemic orientation may give some readers pause before ascribing him status as an accurate authority on the Kanaka condition of his time. In the interest of fairness, a brief listing of said facets will now be

⁷⁸ Hawai'i Literary Arts Council, "Hawai'i Award for Literature", HI, Retrieved Sept. 18, 2021, <https://www.hawaii.edu/hlac/hiaward.htm>.

Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai'i, "Living Treasures, List of Honorees- Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai'i", Honolulu, HI, Retrieved Sept. 18, 2021, <https://hongwanjihawaii.com/living-treasures/list-of-honorees/>.

⁷⁹ Holt, John Dominis, and Alice Sinesky. *John Dominis Holt*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Watumull Foundation Oral History Project, 1987.

Sumida, Stephen H., *And the View from the Shore: Literary Traditions of Hawai'i*, Seattle, WA, Univ. of Washington Press, 1991, 163.

presented. First and foremost, Holt's aristocratic status and upbringing (of which he was inordinately proud throughout his life) meant that he did write from a place of considerable privilege, and thus his evaluation of deleterious imperial impact on Hawaii and the plight faced by many maka'ainana in the wake of colonization may have been considerably inaccurate. Indeed, he passingly mentions scenes of extreme poverty and squalor witnessed in certain areas of Hawaii in his youth, but they do not feature heavily as he simply wasn't around such areas for long.⁸⁰ One may also argue that Holt's perspective, despite being incredibly influential in his later years, was not reflective of the Kanaka of his time; he himself yields this point, claiming that his worldview always seemed very different to him than those of the ali'i and haole notables he grew up among.⁸¹

Despite these potential points of contention, I still must argue that Holt, and body of work, fully deserve the legacy and impact that history and global audiences afforded them. His writings provide a comprehensive theory of being for mid-twentieth century Kanaka, illustrating what Hawaii meant, what its people meant, and what its unique society meant in a post-annexation, rapidly-developing world. He worked as a conservator of knowledge, and arrived at a thorough understanding of his world by striving to understand himself. His love of family and legacy led to scholarly products which ensorcelled the hearts and minds of countless readers, many of whom would likely know nothing at all about Hawaiian history if not for his approachable, entertaining

⁸⁰ Eg. Holt, John Dominis. *Recollections: Memoirs of John Dominis Holt*. Honolulu: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1993, 33, 70-72.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 156-158, 199, 203-204.

prose. As Holt provided an exceptional theory of Kanakaness, one of his contemporaries—Indigenous academic, religious leader, and public administrator Charles Kenn—provided an equally-commendable praxis.

Chapter II: Charles Kenn— The Past Among Us

Presently, programs of cultural preservation and promulgation, essential for the survival of Indigenous cultures in many colonial and post-colonial regions, are mammoth undertakings carried out by teams of academics, activists, and public policy functionaries, with extensive support from Native peoples themselves and partners from across greater regions or the globe. Concerted efforts, coordinating dozens or hundreds of people, are underway to save languages, artforms, and cultural practices considered at risk by international observers. Imagine, the tenacity, forethought, and intellect necessary to perform such acts of conservation near single-handedly. Charles Kenn, the second focus of this project, did just that several times throughout his life, serving as the effective sole conservator of certain Hawaiian practices, and contributing significantly to the resurgence of many more championed by his contemporaries.

Charles William Kenn was, much like John Dominis Holt, a Kanaka polymath fascinated with and reverent of the wisdom of his kupuna, and determined to legitimize and share it within the intellectual communities of the wider world. Also like Holt, Kenn was an *ali'i*, though one possessed of significantly humbler means at the time of his birth, despite a lineage that could be traced to one of Kamehameha I's closest allies.⁸² While Holt's writings and work were very much in character with his status as a rather privileged post-usurpation *ali'i*, gently leading audiences through guided tours of fine art, relaying tales from the last days of the Kanaka court scene, and cataloguing the flora and

⁸² Crowningburg-Amalu, Samuel, "A call to recognize Charles Kenn, expert on Island history, ethnology," *Honolulu Advertiser*, Honolulu, HI, 1983.

In the interest of fairness, the only concrete, textual source for this information I could find, cited above, is not exactly reputable, as we shall see, though I have ample reason to believe his claims regarding Kenn's lineage.

fauna of the islands, Kenn's efforts and reputation depict him as the archetypal *kahuna*, in roles as both expert and mystic, working in the twentieth century. An unparalleled authority on many topics and in many distinct fields relating to Hawaiian history and culture, Kenn served in various influential positions in civic, governmental, and academic organizations throughout his life, and his many exploits demonstrate first and foremost how one invested in and arguing for Indigenous survival can move between spheres—Native and imperial, official and unofficial, sacred and profane—to advance the cause of the same.

The goals of this chapter closely mirror those of the first, with Kenn's work and attitudes being assessed similarly to Holt's before them. By the conclusion of the discussion outlined herein, it is my hope that the audience will appreciate the tremendous impact of Charles Kenn and his unorthodox activism on modern Kanaka (and broader Hawaiian) culture, history, art, and institutions. Of course, the same questions we attempted to answer for Mr. Holt will be asked again here, though the nature of Kenn's narrative voice and relative scarcity of available materials he personally penned will necessitate a greater degree of extrapolation on my part. As a considerable amount of commentary surrounding Kenn must necessarily be sourced from other authors and agencies, the overall structure of this chapter will differ slightly from the first. As before, three principal sections will comprise the entire chapter, but the content of each will seek to address a different aspect of Kenn and his legacy, rather than a particular subset of his full body of work. The first chapter, following an anecdotal prelude, will concern Kenn's many roles, offices, and adventures as a Kanaka cultural expert, as well as general information regarding his life. The second will be a simple analysis of his textual

products, most notably a particularly rare academic booklet authored for an esoteric research agency whose premises and goals *strongly* contrast with those of Western academia. Finally, Kenn's impact on Hawaii and its people will be considered in a short conclusion, merited here as the polymath has left an incredible impression upon groups and institutions concerned with Kanaka heritage, and was thusly often recognized with praise and decoration throughout his professional life; rhetoric accompanying such recognition often assigns an unusually significant, or even unique, place to Kenn among Hawai'i's agents of cultural revival.

While there is much of, for lack of a better word, "conventional" scholarly merit to consider herein, be aware that Kenn's career was often eclectic, bizarre, and entertaining, spanning a far greater range of formats and fora than Holt's. Over his time as a public intellectual, he engaged with the journalistic remnants of King Kalakaua's kingdom-wide hearts-and-minds campaign for the preservation of an independent Hawai'i, collaborated with a convicted con man *par excellence* in Folsom State Prison and the representatives of a strange Midwestern cult based on Hawaiian culture to educate others about the Kanaka past, and trained in a plethora of obscure physical and spiritual disciplines in the name of preservation. Kenn's work allows an invested reader to discover that more than shame may be behind the unwillingness of kahuna to share their arts with the wider community, as well as study thriving arts brought into the modern day through savvy custodianship and diligent grassroots education. Our survey begins fairly late into his career, in the early 1970s, when two of the Kanaka Hawai'i's greatest, most beloved cultural experts came to loggerheads over very divergent readings of their past during federal deliberations surrounding an Oahu valley.

A Praxis of Modern Hawaiian Survival: Charles Kenn in the World

Easily the most frustrating aspect of researching Mr. Kenn for this project was the relative scarcity of materials he personally penned. His name or work are frequently invoked by others, as is his general presence in one of seemingly thousands of official roles he played as a cultural expert, but the readily-available works produced by his hand are very light in volume. Not necessarily *number*, as will be seen, but *volume*, as Kenn's writing style was notably terse and direct, rendering many of his works a handful of pages in length, if incredibly rich in content. Thus, just as much about Charles Kenn can be gleaned from *what* he wrote about or *in what official capacity* as what he actually wrote. Few of his pieces speak so strongly in both content and context than his contribution to a scholarly investigation in 1973.

That year, Moanalua, a valley on the island of Oahu which had been the hearth of at least one pre-contact Kanaka community, was under consideration for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, following the submission of an independently-prepared report alleging a particular historic, cultural, religious, and aesthetic significance meriting stalwart preservation. Inclusion in the register would go some distance in protecting the area from rampant development or exploitation, and could be seen as a victory for Kanaka conservators. Kenn's name first appears in relation to the Moanalua deliberations in an anthology report submitted for consideration by a number of scholars and preservation policy experts submitted months after the initial application, wherein he authored a small chapter on readings of Native histories and notable persons cited in the

application.⁸³ His contribution, though characteristically succinct, demonstrated both a masterful command of “old Hawaiian” history and customs as well as the personal familiarity with and dedication to people and places entwined with more ephemeral subject matter cultivated by the most experienced area specialists in the social sciences and humanities.⁸⁴

Two things about the report, originally obtained for this project largely because of Mr. Kenn’s contribution to it and the relevant policymaking process, surprised me. Firstly, the application the report served as an analysis of and response to, filed by an organ of the Damon family estate which had territory and interests in Moanalua, *was penned by John Dominis Holt and his second wife, Frances Holt, nee Damon*. Indeed, this is evident in the text of the application, attached to the report as an appendix, which overflows with John’s characteristically flowery, vivid descriptions of the valley’s flora, fauna, architecture, and notables.⁸⁵ One could hardly imagine a coincidental discovery better suiting a juxtapositional project like this one! The second unexpected facet of the report

⁸³ Newman, Thomas Stell, Dorothy R. Pyle, Anne H. Takemoto, and Charles W. Kenn. *Analysis of the Moanalua National Historic Landmark Application Significance Statement*, Honolulu, HI, State of Hawaii, Dept. of Transportation/Dept. of Land and Natural Resources, 1973, 60-64.

⁸⁴ Though it should be noted Kenn, an accomplished professional with several academic credentials and decades of public practice to his name at the time of the report’s publication, was the *only* contributor whose credentials go entirely ignored therein; in a document compiled largely by haole scholars and officials of various standing, the earned accolades of a local graduate student assisting with some work apparently deserved greater recognition than an elder near-universally described as *the* leading Indigenous authority on culture, customs, and history at the time. Kenn is identified as merely a Native specialist, in much the same way an anthropologist may describe a nondescript local collaborator (a practice which, itself, would be problematic to many, this author included), despite completing postgraduate programs of study and decades of public service in fields related to education and governance prior to 1973.

⁸⁵ Newman, Thomas Stell, Dorothy R. Pyle, Anne H. Takemoto, and Charles W. Kenn. *Analysis of the Moanalua National Historic Landmark Application Significance Statement*, Honolulu, HI, State of Hawaii, Dept. of Transportation/Dept. of Land and Natural Resources, 1973, 87-142.

was its authors' *universal* condemnation of the Holts' case, evidence, and desire to protect Moanalua as a historically significant site. Charles Kenn was especially animated in his refutation of the initial application's narrative and interpretation, calling the Holts' historical conclusions "hog-wash!" and "[containing] not a single fact."⁸⁶ This is both shocking and an ample opportunity for analysis. Why would Charles Kenn, one of the mid-twentieth century's leading voices and champions of Kanaka culture, contribute to the opposition of another's efforts to preserve an environment thought to have some cultural significance?

The best suggestion I can offer is that *what* past was being preserved, and *how*, drew the border between Kenn's and Holt's reasoning over what the former termed "The Moanalua Controversy." The claims of *uniquely* significant historical, cultural, and religious traits the Holts ascribed to Moanalua appear, as of 1973, to have been substantiated entirely by a collection of notebooks and journals passed down through the Damon family, who were granted ownership over lands including Moanalua by Princess Pauahi, last of the Kamehamehas, before her death.⁸⁷ While many of the report's authors, Kenn included, state that the information contained therein possesses some real merit to observers of Hawaiian history and that of the wealthy, influential Damons in particular, they decisively state that many of the texts' claims about the valley were simply unsubstantiated. Kenn, himself a good deal older and more familiar with many

⁸⁶ Ibid., 60-61.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 139-141,

Downey, Kirstin, "The Sun Is Setting On One Of Hawai'i's Last Legacy Estates," *Honolulu Civil Beat*, Honolulu, HI, 2019, Retrieved Sept. 18, 2021, <https://www.civilbeat.org/2019/10/the-sun-is-setting-on-one-of-hawaiis-last-historic-estates/>.

institutional vestiges of Kanaka narrativity than even the Holts, whose expertise always strayed close to the experiences and readings of specifically latter-day aristocrats, personally knew one of the kupuna cited in the initial application. A venerable chanter and, thus, Indigenous oral historian of Moanalua, she had performed certain tales before Kenn in the past, in order for them to be recorded and archived. The latter is plain in his assessment; the woman was a legitimate vector of Native historical authority, and her stories, as engaged in both the application and the report, did nothing to support the former.⁸⁸ Each scholar included among the report's staff soundly refuted the Holts' premises for preserving and recognizing *all* of Moanalua as a unique font of Hawaiian heritage, and, doubtless, commercial entities were eagerly awaiting approval to buy up and develop lands therein at the time of writing. Thus, upon receiving Kenn et. al.'s analysis, the State of Hawai'i acted swiftly. According to the introductory pages of the report, its findings were accepted by the state's relevant organs, and the motion to recognize Moanalua progressed no further.⁸⁹

There is one critical fact about the Moanalua debate and the application itself that the analysis of scholars both Kanaka and haole made clear: while the information contained in the Damon family notebooks was of some merit, *John Dominis and Frances Holt unquestionably exaggerated both the authority offered by the same and the significance they ascribed to Moanalua, lands which were still largely in the care of Frances' family at the time of submission.* This is not to accuse such venerable, beloved figures of

⁸⁸ Newman, Thomas Stell, Dorothy R. Pyle, Anne H. Takemoto, and Charles W. Kenn. *Analysis of the Moanalua National Historic Landmark Application Significance Statement*, Honolulu, HI, State of Hawaii, Dept. of Transportation/Dept. of Land and Natural Resources, 1973, 60, 64.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, i.

malicious deceit, but it is apparent that they embellished accounts to protect *specific* (i.e. *their*) lands. The reasoning for this could take many forms: perhaps (and this is my best guess) the Holts, already very active forces in land conservation around the islands, sought to preserve the Damon lands by any reasonable means, and the notebooks provided just enough justification for a spirited, desperate attempt at the national register's protection. Perhaps, as translation was at the heart of many of Kenn's criticisms (and he was widely recognized, as will be seen, as a superlative translator of "old" 'olelo Hawai'i), simple mistranslation or misinterpretation caused the Holts and their allies to mistakenly ascribe far more to Moanalua than Kenn et. al. deemed appropriate. Perhaps the Holts—especially John, for whom Hawaiian history and culture were always deeply personal, wrapped up tightly with familial identity and inheritance—merely afforded far too much authority to their family's records. I believe this last point is at least partially responsible for the discrepancy between Kenn's and the Holts' actions surrounding Moanalua, and a deeper analysis of it will be the best vector through which one can see the type of professional, activist, and kahuna Charles Kenn was.

Kenn was, despite working for Western academic institutions and the imperial State of Hawai'i at various stages of his life, a stalwart defender of Kanaka ritual, wisdom, and narrative. Students who he trained in physical and spiritual disciplines conserved from pre-contact Hawaiian society remembered him as a font of stories, trivia, and praxis dating to generations before his birth, and a kind but demanding instructor who persistently impressed upon his pupils the importance of preserving "tradition" *as it was*, in both theory and praxis. Kenn cared first and foremost that the *correct, most accurate*

items and narratives from the Kanaka past were preserved, interpreted, and shared *correctly*, so that the whole of the Kanaka nation could receive the proper inheritance—any old stories unsupported by fonts of Indigenous knowledge (institutions, lineages of lorekeepers, masters of dance and chant, etc.) simply wouldn't do.⁹⁰ It is this insistence on precision and veracity, then, which likely inflamed Kenn so during the Moanalua affair; as he explained, the Holts were relying almost exclusively upon very selective (to him, wholly inaccurate) translations of Indigenous oral histories, songs, and chants to support the factuality of their own family's sources. They did this not in defiance of biased or dismissive Western epistemology and study, but of long-respected, dominant Kanaka sources and knowledge. It is my best guess that the privileging of an unproven family history over the mo'olelo passed down by generations of exceptionally-studious kupuna was a principal cause for Kenn's borderline shock in response to the Moanalua application; the *real* Hawaiian history was sitting right there in the valley, so why didn't they look for it?

Charles Kenn was a man singularly devoted to the preservation, legitimization, and disbursement of Hawaiian historical and cultural narratives and practices, a lifelong student of whatever esoteric practitioners would have him and a contributor to Western, trans-Polynesian, and local Kanaka institutions and resource bases. His approaches to scholarship, education, and preservation were all marked, in my mind, by a clever pragmatism; while Kenn often worked for Hawaiian government agencies, sometimes in

⁹⁰ Paglinawan, Richard Kekumuikawaiokeola, Mitchell Eli, Moses Elwood Kalauokalani, Kristina Pilaho'ohau'oli Kikuchi-Palenapa, and Jerry Walker, *Lua: Art of the Hawaiian Warrior*, Honolulu, HI, Bishop Museum Press, 2006, 3, 5-7

inglorious offices with niche interest and audiences, nearly every account of him in said offices demonstrates him using all of the capabilities they afforded to advance the missions of Kanaka intellectual culture.

For example, Kenn served the County of Honolulu's Department of Parks and Recreation for some time as "Director of Hawaiian Activities", a position which no longer exists within the agency, but was, based upon what information is available, chiefly concerned with the provision of Polynesian-themed amusements and rudimentary cultural education aimed at haole tourists and residents of the islands. His work in said office included the research and presentation of Indigenous sports, crafts, and language in limited capacities. One may think such a position ill-suited to a serious mission of cultural preservation, intended as it was to package certain aspects of culture for a commercial audience, but Kenn made use of his time in office quite well. While serving Honolulu County, he used his work to record audio of Kanaka cultural practices, including song, dance, chant, and even some niche religious rituals unconcerned with any of the aforementioned. His recordings, many of which made their way into academic and community organization collections, provided substance to many twentieth century studies of Kanaka art, narrativity, and religious ceremony.⁹¹ Such a position also afforded Kenn the opportunity to gather a large body of physical, nontextual sources; a student

⁹¹ Honolulu Advertiser Staff. "Charles W. Kenn Funeral Notice", *Honolulu Advertiser*, Honolulu, HI, 1988, Retrieved Sept. 18, 2021, <https://www.newspapers.com/clip/20259399/kenn-charles-w-funeral-notice-1988/>.

Hula Preservation Society, "1984 Pt. 2 of 2 Na Makua Award Concert," HI, 1984, Video retrieved Sept. 18, 2021, <https://vimeo.com/255136885>.

Tatar, Elizabeth. *Hawaiian Drum DANCE CHANTS: Sounds of Power in Time*. CD. Smithsonian Folkways, 1989, Liner notes.

who visited his humble home in the 1970s described it as filled, wall-to-wall, with cultural artifacts and research materials the elder had acquired.⁹² Beyond entertaining tourists for Honolulu, Kenn occupied a plethora of other government positions oriented towards divergent audiences throughout his professional life, conserving Hawai'i's environment as a consultant for Waimea Falls Park and serving his community by filling a seat on Honolulu County's Board of Parole and Appeals, to name just two.⁹³

Kenn's public service, though often engaged in some manner which would allow him to use his vast knowledge base as a "cultural consultant" or "Polynesian cultural expert", in institutional parlance, was seldom tied directly to his role as a professional Hawaiian historian. One civic organization sought to employ him for just that credential, however; the Society of Daughters and Sons of Hawaiian Warriors, which later adopted the 'olelo Hawai'i moniker Ahahui Mamakakua, saw Kenn serve as its "Secretary-Historian" for a number of years around World War II.⁹⁴ The society, comprised of ali'i descendants enthusiastic about the revival and study of their collective heritage, placed a significant focus on the collection, appraisal, and preservation of Hawaiian military artifacts. Members were strongly encouraged to retrieve such objects from their households or communities and present them to the society for scrutiny and sharing with wider

⁹² Paglinawan, Richard Kekumuikawaiokeola, Mitchell Eli, Moses Elwood Kalauokalani, Kristina Pilaho'ohau'oli Kikuchi-Palenapa, and Jerry Walker, *Lua: Art of the Hawaiian Warrior*, Honolulu, HI, Bishop Museum Press, 2006, 3.

⁹³ Pogue, John Fawcett, Charles W. Kenn, and J. F. Pokuea, *Moolelo of Ancient Hawaii*, Topgallant Pub. Co, Honolulu, HI, 1978, Introduction.

⁹⁴ Newman, Thomas Stell, Dorothy R. Pyle, Anne H. Takemoto, and Charles W. Kenn. *Analysis of the Moanalua National Historic Landmark Application Significance Statement*, Honolulu, HI, State of Hawaii, Dept. of Transportation/Dept. of Land and Natural Resources, 1973, 64.

audiences.⁹⁵ In his role with the organization, Kenn would have used his considerable knowledge of both cultural history and preservation techniques to authenticate, research, and explain artifacts contributed to its coffers. Remember that, according to Holt's Hawaiian historiography, much of the minutia of pre-contact Kanaka knowledge was difficult to access, and much of it had to be relearned through research and conversation during the early twentieth century; this almost assuredly means that Kenn and the society had to recover a great deal of what, today, is common Native knowledge through very rigorous academic processes.

Kenn has been remembered fondly by cultural experts through the present for his fastidious recording of Indigenous artistic and religious performances, including considerable contributions to the preservation of particular types of Hula ceremony and a Hawaiian variant of a trans-Polynesian fire-walking technique, the latter of which will be examined in the second section of this chapter. He is more frequently tied to the singularly significant role he played in the survival of Lua, a Kanaka martial art which nearly vanished from the Earth prior to his instruction of a small coterie of students in the 1970s. A lengthy examination of Lua and Kenn's relation to and philosophy regarding its diffusion does much to illustrate the expert's unique and potentially divisive stance on how an Indigenous past should be preserved.

Charles Kenn was an ordained master of Lua, a combat art comprised of physical techniques *and* religious ritual in seemingly equal measure, having studied under masters

⁹⁵ "New Hawaiian Society Formed," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, Honolulu, HI, 1917, Transcription retrieved Sept. 18, 2021, <https://nupepa-hawaii.com/2015/09/10/ahahui-mamakakaua-forms-1917/>.

who could trace the genealogy of their instruction back to some of pre-annexation Hawai‘i’s foremost practitioners. By the 1970s, only a handful of Kanaka people remained cognizant of the maneuvers and esoteric practices essential to Lua, with Kenn being among them—and also the only one willing to teach others. He did not advertise this; a Kanaka martial artist seeking to learn more about a paradigm he had only heard mention of in his youth sought out an active practitioner, and had to hunt Kenn down through a series of social connections. The narrative provided by said martial artist and several of his fellow Lua practitioners in a 2006 text published by the Bishop Estate’s own press suggests that Kenn would have happily taken his intricate knowledge of the art to his grave had a dedicated student not chased after the master of his own volition.⁹⁶

Kenn’s instruction was extremely demanding and observant of his best understanding of cultural tradition, with him only agreeing to train his original seeker if the younger man could gather a dozen students willing to adopt his curriculum, as Kamehameha I—a Lua master himself—had a bodyguard comprised of a dozen warriors. Before extending even that offer, Kenn sat with his prospective student for roughly twelve hours, lecturing the latter on Hawaiian history, culture, religion, and genealogy.⁹⁷ Clearly Lua was far more than a martial art to Master Kenn, and so it would need to be for each of his students. While the initial stipulation calling for a twelve-person cohort was later dropped in good faith with the understanding that his students would continue to recruit those interested parties who met his criteria, Kenn’s instruction proved persistently draining

⁹⁶ Paglinawan, Richard Kekumuikawaiokeola, Mitchell Eli, Moses Elwood Kalauokalani, Kristina Pilaho’ohau’oli Kikuchi-Palenapa, and Jerry Walker, *Lua: Art of the Hawaiian Warrior*, Honolulu, HI, Bishop Museum Press, 2006, 1-2.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

and occasionally frustrating for his charges. Hours-long practice sessions comprised of the same several techniques, peppered with lessons on Kanaka culture, stretched on for weeks, with multiple students leaving the ad-hoc program due to irritation with great demands of time and physical exertion seemingly repaid with practical instruction which advanced at a glacial pace. Kenn revealed to his remaining students, beyond a point, that his initial lessons were deliberately maudlin and exhausting, Lua's equivalent of the fabled "flunk-out course" in an academic program. Kenn seemingly wished to convey his knowledge of Lua in full only to a handful of immensely dedicated persons who met his abundant criteria in several dimensions; again, preservation of any Indigenous knowledge at any cost appears to have been less important than ensuring *whatever is preserved is preserved properly*.⁹⁸ His conflicting desire to share Lua with interested Kanaka practitioners and refusal to do so with many aspirants can be understood with a deeper study of Lua itself, along with comments made by Kenn and other Lua practitioners regarding the art's significance to a modern Hawai'i.

At a glance, Lua resembles kenpo, the Japanese bone-breaking style of karate, in function, and something like a weaponized *Three Stooges* routine in form, with eye-poking, ear-twisting, and strikes to the face and throat all applied to debilitating ends. One of Lua's foremost *physical* traits is an emphasis on rendering one's opponent unable—not unwilling—to continue combative movement, through elimination of sensory input or by the injury or destruction of bones.⁹⁹ Lua is a fascinating physical artform, to be certain, but more relevant here is its deep spiritual and cultural dimension.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 4-7.

⁹⁹ Sodehara, Naomi, "Way of the Warrior," *Hana Hou!*, 2003, Retrieved Sept. 18, 2021.

According to the masters who studied under Kenn, at the time of their training, the meaning of the word “Lua” itself was long-buried under the pall of imperial mist which shrouded view of much of the Kanaka past into the twentieth century. Only some elders and practitioners knew that the word could be used to refer to a fighting style (it is most commonly used in modern Hawai‘i to refer to toilets), and fewer still knew the significance of the name. Lua can literally mean *two*, or represent the concept of *duality*. Through the lens of kaona too complex for me to risk misinterpreting it here, practitioners understand Lua—the martial art—to have a name representing the *duality of life and death*. Given the incredible physical power wielded by adherents and the great degree of religious doctrine wound up in Lua techniques, it makes sense that such a name would be chosen. Thus understood, a very rough working translation of the artform’s name would be something like *the way/mastery of life and death*. Indeed, many ritual prayers, invocations, and chants associated with Lua call upon observant akua to determine who among the participants emerges victorious and who falls— who “lives” and who “dies” on the field, even if results are ultimately nonfatal.¹⁰⁰

As should be apparent, Lua encompassed far more than a series of combat techniques; it was, in itself, an integral aspect of a particular form of Indigenous Hawaiian identity. Understand that only the ali‘i could practice Lua prior to the annexation of Hawaii¹⁰¹, and to this day only Native people with a demonstrable, “elite” genealogy (which is not

¹⁰⁰ Paglinawan, Richard Kekumuikawaiokeola, Mitchell Eli, Moses Elwood Kalauokalani, Kristina Pilaho’ohau’oli Kikuchi-Palenapa, and Jerry Walker, *Lua: Art of the Hawaiian Warrior*, Honolulu, HI, Bishop Museum Press, 2006, 9.

¹⁰¹ Outside of times of crisis, when others may have received some rudimentary instruction to allow for wider involvement in martial efforts- Sodetani, Naomi, “Way of the Warrior,” *Hana Hou!*, 2003, Retrieved Sept. 18, 2021.

terribly hard to come by, given the number and breadth of ali‘i houses, but does exclude some Kanaka people and all foreigners) are eligible for instruction by Hawai‘i’s handful of Lua schools.¹⁰² Observance of this criterion, and of the art’s extensive religious aspects, were crucial to Kenn; he required his students to present him with genealogical charts and practice prayers, chants, and esoteric rituals along with their physical maneuvers.¹⁰³ Classical Lua possessed more than religious and genealogical requirements for its practitioners, however; according to one adherent of Lua in modern Hawai‘i, students of the art were expected to consistently demonstrate exemplary moral and civic conduct, elevating themselves beyond reproach by nature of their actions and comportment. This criterion is likely why Kenn attempted to wear some of his prospective students down via attrition; only those patient enough to endure the tedium and demands of his initial training willingly would have possessed the moral character and judgement requisite for education.¹⁰⁴

Given its incredible demands for time, exertion, demography, character, and spirit, it is perhaps understandable why Lua, in its classical form, was significantly more difficult to preserve than, say, styles of song or dance. Kenn, for his part, was consistently fixated on preserving Lua *as it was* to the greatest extent possible in his circumstances; he

¹⁰² Omaye, Jayna, “Will These 4 Hawaiian Traditions Disappear Forever? Meet the Teachers Who Are Fighting to Keep Them Alive,” *Honolulu Magazine*, Honolulu, HI, 2019, Retrieved Sept. 19, 2021, <https://www.honolulumagazine.com/will-these-4-hawaiian-traditions-disappear-forever-meet-the-teachers-who-are-fighting-to-keep-them-alive/>.

¹⁰³ Paglinawan, Richard Kekumuikawaiokeola, Mitchell Eli, Moses Elwood Kalauokalani, Kristina Pilaho‘ohau‘oli Kikuchi-Palenapa, and Jerry Walker, *Lua: Art of the Hawaiian Warrior*, Honolulu, HI, Bishop Museum Press, 2006, ix, 2-3, 37, 40-41.

¹⁰⁴ Omaye, Jayna, “Will These 4 Hawaiian Traditions Disappear Forever? Meet the Teachers Who Are Fighting to Keep Them Alive,” *Honolulu Magazine*, Honolulu, HI, 2019, Retrieved Sept. 19, 2021, <https://www.honolulumagazine.com/will-these-4-hawaiian-traditions-disappear-forever-meet-the-teachers-who-are-fighting-to-keep-them-alive/>.

frequently urged his students to “keep the core”—share Lua with others, but to do so in accordance with traditional requirements, both to maintain the unique merits of the art and to prevent its commercialization or abuse with its onerous demands of practitioners.¹⁰⁵ After Kenn’s death, most of the few masters he had ordained set out to open their own schools of Lua, which remain operable in Hawai‘i to this day. They still adhere to many of Kenn’s restrictions, but do manage to present a comprehensive curriculum far faster.¹⁰⁶ Something none of his students seem to have forgotten—something which appeared several times in my research in one form or another, is the “keep the core” doctrine of preserving the past *the right way*, as it was, to avoid losing its appeal or the lessons which can be gleaned from it. Kenn’s attitude towards preservation of cultural practices, and Lua in particular, may seem objectionable to those public historians who would argue that preservation of any kind or by any means is flatly preferable to no preservation at all, but I believe there is an especially trenchant lesson outlined by Kenn’s stance. That lesson is that preserving something without understanding *why* it is being preserved, what it means for the creator or creators, and *how* it should survive in the world (i.e. as a rite or amusement circulating freely throughout enthusiast circles rather than meticulously assessed and filed away by an academic archive) can leave one with cultural detritus—something that exists without or beyond the context in which it originally served the world, and is the worse for it. Kenn wished to preserve Lua in such a demanding, exclusionary fashion, by and large, because

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.,

Sodetani, Naomi, “Way of the Warrior,” *Hana Hou!*, 2003, Retrieved Sept. 18, 2021, <https://hanahou.com/6.2/way-of-the-warrior>.

to do less—to lessen the requirements for students or focus on purely physical training at the expense of metaphysical ritual, for instance—would be to dilute it into a form bereft of the special qualities it had possessed in the eyes of Kanaka practitioners and religious leaders for generations. To do so would create something that, despite a superficial resemblance, *was not Lua*. I believe it is telling that Kenn’s approach, exacting as it was, was immensely successful in bringing Lua, through his original class of students, to an entire generation of Kanaka practitioners with all of its rich cultural context intact. Kenn is remembered broadly as the savior of Lua for a reason, after all.¹⁰⁷

“Huna na mea huna. Keep secret what is sacred. If you don’t respect this kapu, someday
Lua will be taught for money and greed.”

-Attributed to Charles Kenn, *Lua: Art of the Hawaiian Warrior*¹⁰⁸

Sidebar: The Implausible World of Sammy Amalu

Charles Kenn won many influential admirers throughout his time working in Kanaka cultural preservation and enrichment, many of whom will be highlighted in the final section of this chapter. One, however, deserves a dedicated profile herein. I adamantly believe that the very best history is merely the performative art of good stories told well, and our subject here is a perfect example of what one can accomplish by adopting such an outlook—even though many of their stories were not truthful in the least. My research

¹⁰⁷ Paglinawan, Richard Kekumuikawaiokeola, Mitchell Eli, Moses Elwood Kalauokalani, Kristina Pilaho’ohau’oli Kikuchi-Palenapa, and Jerry Walker, *Lua: Art of the Hawaiian Warrior*, Honolulu, HI, Bishop Museum Press, 2006, front flap, 6, 64-5.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

on Charles Kenn’s life and work took me to some rather unorthodox places, but none were stranger—or generally more amusing—than the wonderful World of Sammy Amalu.

Samuel “Sammy” Crowningberg-Amalu was an extremely popular newspaper columnist and author whose pieces regularly ran in the Honolulu Advertiser for well over a decade under the “World of Sammy Amalu” banner. At least two separate generations were educated and entertained by Amalu, himself the child of an ali‘i, sharing a wide variety of tales, trivia, and opinion pieces under bylines that featured the man himself, laughing warmly, Hawaiian regalia around his neck. Amalu’s content varied widely, and he was granted significant latitude thanks to a close relationship with an influential editor at the paper, but his column generally focused on engaging, eloquent retellings of mo’olelo, stories from or about the Hawaiian monarchy’s courts, brief lessons in Hawaiian language and custom, and other topics relevant to Kanaka indigeneity.¹⁰⁹ He also contributed his expertise to at least one more substantial work, a short volume on Kanaka music co-authored with several area experts and published through a local Pacific press in the 1970s.¹¹⁰

One installment of Amalu’s column, published in 1983, was dedicated exclusively to praise of Charles Kenn and a detailed recounting of his life’s work and relation to the

¹⁰⁹ Siegall, Bob, “Rearview Mirror: Sammy Crowningburg-Amalu was a widely respected con man,” *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, Honolulu, HI, 2019, Retrieved Sept. 19, 2021, <https://www.staradvertiser.com/2019/05/24/hawaii-news/rearview-mirror/rearview-mirror-sammy-crowningburg-amalu-was-a-widely-respected-con-man/>.

¹¹⁰ Crowningburg-Amalu, Samuel, Herbert Kawainui Kane, Emerson Curtis Smith, Theodore Kelsey, and Martin Charlot, *On Hawaiian Folk Music*, Island Heritage Limited, Honolulu, HI, 1971.

author. Amalu, who was the first source I encountered detailing Kenn's descent from one of Kamehameha's courtiers, was apparently acquainted with the kahuna and had obtained a considerable share of his knowledge of the Kanaka past from their conversations. Amalu extols Kenn's work with public organizations in preserving Hawaiian cultural artifacts and memory, and reserves particular praise for his supposedly-convincing argument that ancestral tombs should have their intact artifacts removed and studied by qualified professionals, so long as the remains of the dead themselves were undisturbed. This is, to say the least, a controversial perspective for an Indigenous advocate, but in accord with Kenn's general emphasis on ascertaining the past as *accurately* as possible to avoid misrepresentation or the distortion of public memory.¹¹¹

Amalu himself would normally merit more comprehensive coverage in a project such as this, as a widely-beloved cultural icon cognizant of and invested in the revival of interest in Kanaka history, even if a large portion of his knowledge base was sourced from Kenn. Indeed, I would have been tempted to include him in place of Kenn due to his body of work being produced explicitly for the general public and preserved rather well to this day, were it not for one minor issue. The Sammy Amalu who amicably, floridly walked readers through lore, praxis, and human interest stories from his homeland was not merely an affable citizen-journalist.

Rather, Samuel Crowningburg-Amalu was, famously and openly, a serial fraudster remembered as one of modern Hawaii's most "popular" criminals, and a man for whom

¹¹¹ Crowningburg-Amalu, Samuel, "A call to recognize Charles Kenn, expert on Island history, ethnology," *Honolulu Advertiser*, Honolulu, HI, 1983.

deception was a stock in trade. In fact—and *I am not making this up*—he began his column from Folsom State Prison in California, where he had been sentenced to seven years’ incarceration following one of many extremely bizarre cons committed throughout his life.¹¹² An unrelated crime years prior saw him pose, via correspondence, as the representative of a Swiss “presidium” of investors looking to buy up Hawaiian hotels and other properties using bad checks and other implements of grift, aided only by an erstwhile cadre of Californian youths he had recruited as “part-time employees” for a summer.¹¹³ Amalu was well-known for telling exaggerated, often contradictory tales regarding his family, multiple marriages, and adventures around the world, and was arrested repeatedly for confidence schemes. People knew these details, and yet they *still* consumed his writings in the *Advertiser* religiously, despite—or perhaps because of—them. Scores of Kanaka and haole readers adored his work, and propelled him to relative comfort behind and beyond bars. Such is the incredible allure of a good story told well: it can open windows in one’s mind, construct doors to faraway lands, or cast open cell doors for its performer!

¹¹² Siegall, Bob, “Rearview Mirror: Sammy Crowningburg-Amalu was a widely respected con man,” *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, Honolulu, HI, 2019, Retrieved Sept. 19, 2021, <https://www.staradvertiser.com/2019/05/24/hawaii-news/rearview-mirror/rearview-mirror-sammy-crowningburg-amalu-was-a-widely-respected-con-man/>.

¹¹³ Keany, Michael, Jenny de Jesus, A. Kam Napier, “Rogues, Rascals, and Villains,” *Honolulu Magazine*, Honolulu, HI, 2008, Retrieved Sept. 19, 2021, <https://www.honolulumagazine.com/rogues-rascals-and-villains/>.

For Audiences of All Sorts: The Varied Written Works of Charles Kenn

Charles Kenn's authorial career spanned at least four and a half decades, and saw him ally with human-interest publications for a wide audience, university-aligned and independent academic organizations, Hawai'i-based small publishers with special interest in Indigenous topics, and even an esoteric metaphysical institution to connect with the public. This section will examine those items from Kenn's extensive bibliography which I have been able to attain, with the exceptions of his contribution to the Moanalua historic significance application report, which has already been discussed here, and a translation of one particular anthology of Kanaka historic episodes, which will be covered in the chapter's final section due to the nature of its publication. My intent is for the following discussion to demonstrate, despite working with a fairly small sourcebase, a number of consistent, prominent themes in Charles Kenn's narrative style, interpretation of sources, Indigenous and otherwise, and intended goals for his work. The organs which published Kenn's work will also be examined in various detail, as they represent a wide range of interests and institutional epistemologies in regards to Kanaka people and knowledge, and I would argue that the author's willingness to work with/through each was an integral indicator of his pragmatic approach to preservation and education.

The earliest publication of Kenn's I have access to is an article published in a 1935 edition of *Pan-Pacific Magazine*, intended for a mixed audience of academics, enthusiasts, and laypeople interested in the Pacific world and its cultures. The magazine was a product of a non-profit organization called the Pan-Pacific Union, which was dedicated to the scholarly, scientific exploration of Oceanic societies, nature, and material

culture. Based on information available, the Hawai‘i-based union appears to have borne a genuine investment in the recruitment of and collaboration between Native and global academics of all fields with an interest in the region, with many of their projects’ aims intended to increase the availability and quality of education and other public goods. However, its own self-descriptive language bears many hallmarks of imperial epistemology, as well as what we would now refer to as “Modernization” epistemology. Used here, “Modernization” refers to a range of models which generally held that scientific and technological advancement throughout history led to an ever-increasing quality of life, that Enlightenment ideals and premises were empirically superior to all alternatives, and that a nebulous “progress”—defined in Western, colonial terms, most often—was effectively concomitant with material and moral goodness and should thus be pursued at all costs. While not exactly inseparable from Euro-American imperial thought and rhetoric, and atimes cognizant of the excesses of the same, Modernization theories are, understandably, often viewed as an ally of or source of legitimization for actions undertaken in the interest of the former. The union and its contributors, many of them Native people, also appears to have been susceptible to the type of absolutist, racialized pseudoscience which still propagated as of the 1930’s, even if they often used *positive* interpretations of “innate” traits of Oceanic “races”.¹¹⁴

Kenn, noted as having already completed his time as Honolulu County’s Director of Hawaiian Activities and introduced to the magazine’s audience with the merit of that office as his chief accolade, wrote a fairly simple, if comprehensive, piece on Kanaka

¹¹⁴ Pan-Pacific Union, *Mid-Pacific Magazine*, Honolulu, HI, October-December 1935, 285-286.

sport and recreation for *Mid-Pacific*.¹¹⁵ He brusquely walked readers through short vivid descriptions of various types of wrestling, handicraft, games of chance, and performance, with many receiving simple, one-paragraph profiles, and some others as much as a full page of his time. Surfing, for instance, is the recipient of a great deal of attention, with Kenn noting a documentary history of the sport dating back to the eighteenth century, its incredible popularity in the Hawai‘i of his time, and the international acclaim won by Pan-Pacific Union founder Alexander Hume Ford by merit of his incredible skill with a board.¹¹⁶ Kenn’s profiles are uniformly direct and simple in their composition, with a reader’s comprehension clearly in mind as he wrote.

A distinction between the ways in which Holt and Kenn explain cultural concepts or terms in ‘olelo Hawai‘i is immediately noticeable: while Holt often provided lengthy, aesthetic descriptions of a thing’s physical form, or a battery of best-fits for words or concepts, Kenn often provides conceptual analogues that may be more comprehensible to readers unfamiliar with Kanaka culture, even if they are not exact translations or equivalents. For instance, his *Mid-Pacific* article is populated by scores of references to Japanese sport, craft, and concept, intended to convey the general *nature* of a Kanaka analogue (such as a passage where he compares a form of recreational staff-fighting to kendo, which bares only a passing resemblance) to an audience which may be more familiar with the former.¹¹⁷ It is not unlikely that a great deal of the periodical’s readership would possess some passing familiarity with Japanese popular culture and art,

¹¹⁵ Kenn, Charles W., “Ancient Hawaiian Sports and Pastimes”, *Mid-Pacific Magazine*, Honolulu, HI, October-December 1935, 308-316.

¹¹⁶ Eg. *Ibid.*, 310, 313.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 310.

given its focus. Kenn's translations may not always have been as accurate to their context of origin as possible (though he was certainly capable of constructing them this way, as will be seen), but he clearly knew when to deliberately apply looser translation in the interest of reader comprehension.

One theme omnipresent in Kenn's narrative is the crucial role sport and recreation played in pre-contact Kanaka civic and religious life. The spiritual aspects of various activities, recreational combat in particular, are explored at length, with the author listing various ceremonies which accompanied particular contests, the types of portents which their particulars could reveal, and the akua invoked to preside over or speak through each.¹¹⁸ Unsurprisingly, his brief description of Lua is diffuse with spiritual context, as he paints the art as a form of sacred combat occurring simultaneously on two planes—the physical, decided by devastating, bone-breaking techniques, and the metaphysical, decided by various types of psychic assault.¹¹⁹

Kenn's abilities as a translator and appraiser of the Kanaka past were lauded throughout his life, and were displayed prominently in the work he undertook for a simple human-interest article titled "How Do You Say Hawai'i?", published in a 1944 edition of *Paradise of the Pacific*. The publication was another popular periodical, intended for an even more general audience than *Mid-Pacific Magazine* and established by a royal decree of King Kalakaua in 1888.¹²⁰ Another item in Kalakaua's seemingly-

¹¹⁸ There was, for instance, a deity tasked solely with the oversight of Kanaka arm-wrestling- Lohelohe. A very rough translation of their name would be "The Listening"- Ibid., 315.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 309.

¹²⁰ Kenn, Charles W., "How Do You Say Hawai'i?" *Paradise of the Pacific*, 56, Honolulu, HI, 1944.

endless arsenal of soft-power implements, *Paradise* was intended to cater to a tourist market and encourage positive perception of and commercial investment in the Kingdom of Hawai‘i. Accordingly, the magazine published scores of approachable, digestible articles on various topics related to Hawai‘i and Oceania more broadly, with culture and business very frequently centered within its coverage. *Paradise of the Pacific* was quite successful indeed at launch, and continues publication in the present, over a century later, as *Honolulu Magazine*.

Kenn’s article for *Paradise*, despite the incredibly simple tone set by the title, is actually a robust piece of scholarship combining the author’s wealth of cultural knowledge with then-cutting-edge linguistic, anthropological, and historical studies. Kenn provided readers with a comprehensive history of ‘olelo Hawai‘i in post-contact times, and especially of its transcription during Western missionaries’ assertive introduction of literacy. Relying quite heavily on pieces published by Western scholars in academic organs of similar origin (a theme to be discussed later in this piece), Kenn demonstrated that the missionaries’ creation of a written form for the Hawaiian language and associated syllabary was nothing short of a disaster. With no real academic input or oversight, and no recruitment of literate Hawaiians to assist in transcribing *their own language*, a coterie of evangelists hastily cobbled together an inaccurate syllabary that relied extensively on half-remembered pronunciations and arbitrary assignment of sounds/letters to certain words those involved disagreed on. According to Kenn’s research, there is absolutely no way the processes or actors involved in the transcription of the Hawaiian language would have passed muster under broader scrutiny, and the

resulting mess of a Hawaiian syllabary led to the mispronunciation of scores of words and phrases being codified as *official* pronunciations.¹²¹ Combined with bans on the teaching and usage of ‘olelo Hawai‘i, Kenn demonstrated that something as fundamental as the proper Indigenous pronunciation of his homeland’s name was lost to many for a time, and required some effort to “rediscover” and be shared with the wider community. Given the time of the article’s publication, Kenn’s findings lend credence to Holt’s assertion that much basic Kanaka knowledge was lost or suppressed, and could only emerge into the community again through active missions of rediscovery.

Also supporting this is Kenn’s choice of sources in that and many of his other articles. Unlike Holt, who seemingly-always prioritized Indigenous oral histories or material culture as sources in his works, Kenn relied very heavily on Western or Western-educated scholars for much of his anthropological, artistic, and linguistic insight, many of which rely in turn on racializing, provincializing, and otherwise marginalizing language and paradigm to deliver analysis.¹²² Kenn was an ardent supporter of Indigenous knowledge and history, to be sure, so why would he privilege such studies so? According to Holt’s reasoning, scarcity may have played a critical role. Kenn may have favored Western scholarship in his writings for Western or Western-oriented periodicals as a pragmatic engagement of sources likely to be accepted by his editors and audience, but what if those sources *were all he had*? Remember Holt’s description of the processes of

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ubiquitous throughout:

Kenn, Charles W., “Ancient Hawaiian Sports and Pastimes”, *Mid-Pacific Magazine*, Honolulu, HI, October-December 1935, 308-316.

Kenn, Charles W., “How Do You Say Hawai‘i?” *Paradise of the Pacific*, **56**, Honolulu, HI, 1944,

rediscovery and resumption of dialogue about Indigeneity and history within Kanaka communities—it was a process still ongoing as of the 1970s. With this in mind, it is likely that Kenn, possessed of a treasure trove of Native knowledge by the standards of the time, was largely unable to produce textual sources which would have reflected the Indigenous narratives he sought to incorporate and defend, and thus used acceptable Western sources as the base of his evidence pool, supplemented where possible by his personal knowledge. While only circumstantial, I believe Kenn’s source bases support Holt’s argument for a scarcity or erasure of Indigenous knowledge in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Kenn’s work also extended to the American mainland. He was heavily involved in research on the Kanaka adventurers who were “employed” (read: connived or coerced) by notoriously abusive Dutch colonizer Johann (John) Sutter, who used them and other Indigenous laborers to eke out a small fiefdom in California during the mid-nineteenth century. Kenn personally traveled to and taught university courses in the state during much of his research (and perhaps met with Amalu during these sojourns), collaborating closely with local historical organizations, as evinced by the output presented above. His numerous studies of Kanakas in colonial California uniformly assert a significant Hawaiian impact on the infrastructural and cultural development of many of the region’s communities and industries.

Published in the annals of the Conference of California Historical Societies, Kenn’s most frequently-cited work on Hawaiians in the American West was *Sutter’s Kanakas* (occasionally spelled *Canacas*). It is likely so ubiquitous because the same title applied to

no less than three distinct publications. The version of the scholarship accessed for this project was a brief, characteristically terse summary of Kenn's findings, essentially a robust abstract, published in 1955.¹²³ At least one other, expanded version of the work exists, published later, along with a succeeding piece titled *Descendants of Sutter's Kanakas*. There does exist a possibility that both pieces are one and the same, however, as I cannot find anything beyond a library listing for the expanded *Sutter's Canacas*, and both were published in the same year; perhaps the same work was issued in two different journals with minor alterations? A final California-centered work, a translation of a travelogue-esque account published in a pro-Western Hawaiian-language newspaper in the late 1850s, titled *A Visit to California Gold Fields*, rounds out Kenn's extant library of work on Kanakas on the mainland.¹²⁴

The 1955 version of Kenn's essay established his basic assertions regarding Kanakas on the mainland, reiterated in some form within other versions and the successor piece; these are that Hawaiians were present and active in California during periods of rapid urban and infrastructural development, that their labor and agency had a significant impact upon the same, that their enduring presence in the region had an equally-considerable impact upon regional Californian cultures, and that Kanakas present in

¹²³ Kenn, Charles W., "Sutter's Canacas," in *Newsletter of the Conference of California Historical Societies*, 2, no. 2, Stockton, California, Conference of California Historical Societies, 1955, 3-6.

¹²⁴ Unfortunately, despite being frequently cited, the following two sources have little publication information readily available via digital interface:

Kenn, Charles W., *Sutter's Hawaiians*, nd.

Kenn, Charles W., "Descendants of Captain Sutter's Kanakas," in *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Conference of California Historical Societies*, Stockton, California, Conference of California Historical Societies, 1956, 87-88.

Kenn, Charles W., "A Visit to California Gold Fields," in *Seventy-Fourth Annual Report of the Hawaiian Historical Society*, Honolulu, Hawai'i, 1966, 7-16.

California identified and were identified with a broader Indigeneity to varying degrees over time, which led to a great deal of interactions and cohabitation with Californian Indigenes.¹²⁵

In the paper, Kenn discussed the foundation of a Kanaka settlement in California, named Pu'u Hawai'i, and the success and prosperity attained by many Hawaiian families who severed ties to Sutter's redoubt. He explicitly stated that many of Sutter's Kanaka adventurers were Shanghaied—that is, abducted and spirited away to sea—by prominent merchants in Honolulu, but that many of them were able to eventually set out on their own on the mainland. A number of brief genealogies corresponding to individual Hawaiian families who made the voyage to the mainland were included, and many of them demonstrated considerable intermarriage between Kanaka and Maidu peoples. Listed in one such mixed genealogy was acclaimed artist and folklorist Henry Azbill, who would explore the complexities of his ever-shifting Indigenous identity (sometimes viewing himself as Hawaiian, sometimes as Maidu, sometimes as both, and sometimes as neither) in interviews with an anthropologist late in his life.¹²⁶

A last feature of Kenn's Californian essays that merits discussion here is their focus on Indigenous ritual and spirituality. Often he delivered relatively detailed descriptions of arts created or rituals performed by Kanaka on the mainland, providing some cultural context into the metaphysical origin of the symbolism behind each. By now it should be

¹²⁵ Eg. Sousa, Ashley Riley, "'An Influential Squaw': Intermarriage and Community in Central California, 1839-1851," *Ethnohistory*, **62**, no. 4 (October 2015), 707–27.

¹²⁶ Azbill, Henry, and Dorothy Hill. *Maidu Culture at Chico Rancheria: Round Houses, Religious Dances, Costumes, and Folklore*, Chico, California, 1970.

evident that Charles Kenn was extensively invested in the religious lives of Hawaiian people, and especially those aspects of them associated with pre-contact religion. This is unsurprising, given that he was also a priest who had been trained in several Indigenous spiritual traditions. This aspect of Kenn's personal life, along with his overall stance on metaphysics and research, were brought to the fore of his professional output in the only book he ever authored the principal text of, a slim volume titled *Fire-Walking From the Inside*.

Published in 1949 by a bizarre entity to be outlined shortly, Kenn's monograph was exactly what it claimed on the cover: an extensive, scientific study of the metaphysical elements claimed by practitioners to be invoked and interacted with during "fire-walking" ceremonies, wherein devout individuals would walk across heated coals or other stones laid in a pit without suffering any injury or distress. According to believers, such outcomes (referred to as "immunity" in Kenn's writing) were the result of rituals which variously allowed metaphysical entities, i.e. the akua, to shield practitioners from harm or a battery of rituals performed by a single person which allowed them to bless those who followed them along the path with immunity.¹²⁷

Kenn's methodology and presentation were impeccable, exhibiting all features one would expect from a social-scientific case study of the time. He documented a series of public fire-walking ceremonies performed at a Hawaiian university campus, which saw hundreds of participants walk across the heated stones in the wake of a kahuna who

¹²⁷ Tama-iti, Arii-peu (Charles W. Kenn), *Fire-Walking From the Inside*, Huna Research Incorporated, Cape Girardeau, MO, 1949.

blessed them, in meticulous detail. Support from multiple civic and academic institutions was sourced by the organizers of the performances, indicating a fair amount of popular support for such exhibitions.¹²⁸ Kenn was able to acquire some of his documentation due to close collaboration with those who volunteered to film and photograph the events. Said documentation included copious amounts of photos included in the monograph.¹²⁹ Kenn also provided an extensive literature review, summarizing the findings of Western academics who had previously studied or conducted experiments into Asian and Polynesian fire-walking techniques. Such scholars, whom it must be noted operated in imperial epistemic spaces which were strongly opposed to entertaining a supernatural Indigeneity, generally held that there was no supernatural aspect of fire-walking “immunity”, as some nonbelievers who attempted the practice were able to escape injury.¹³⁰ While Kenn accepted Western studies’ evidence regarding fire-walking, he vociferously disagreed with their conclusions.

One of Kenn’s principal assertions regarding the Western scholarship of the time, which was broadly skeptical of supernatural immunity in fire-walking ceremonies, was that it made many incorrect assumptions regarding the physical circumstances of such ceremonies, and thus several of its attempted explanations of certain phenomena were insufficient. For instance, some studies held that porous stones, if used in ceremonies, could fracture from exposure to extreme heat and thus lose more of their heat than expected prior to practitioners walking across. Kenn’s studies found that none of the

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 5-8.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12-13.

stones split or lost more heat than anticipated during ceremonies, with them remaining hot enough to very quickly cook pieces of steak following the completion of one.¹³¹ Kenn also offered an answer to those who held that nonbelievers successfully completing firewalks proved the lack of a supernatural element; in Kanaka religious frameworks, deities charged with the oversight of specific tasks or facets of life needn't necessarily be supplicated and/or invoked directly to offer their blessings. This contrasts sharply with particular Christian frameworks which formed the basis of many Western epistemologies tied to religion at the time, wherein the Abrahamic god's intercession was contingent upon the belief of the supplicant, and would react with ambivalence—or worse—if nonbelievers attempted to attune to his power. With this epistemic distinction in mind, Kenn argued that Kanaka deities may well grant immunity to one who explicitly did not believe in their power, provided the practitioner displayed the qualities they or their rituals valued (courage, strength, and calm, in the case of fire-walking). This was especially true if a believer had previously invoked them for a ceremony in the same area.¹³²

In the interest of fairness, Kenn did not place the blame for what he saw as wildly inaccurate findings and explanations solely at the feet of Western humbugs; he conceded that a great deal of Native cultural knowledge and context (which he believed was absolutely essential to truly understanding esoteric religious/ceremonial practices)¹³³ was kept beyond their reach due to the seemingly-omnipresent veil of secrecy which seemed

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 17,

¹³² *Ibid.*, 21-25.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 11.

to dominate post-contact intellectual culture in many colonized regions. In fact, Kenn himself refused to disclose all of his knowledge regarding fire-walking practices and rituals, in perfect accord with his scholarly principles, as some of it was purely sacred and kapu to all those but the practicing lineage. He still, of course, shared all he could, including a great deal of liturgy which was entirely unrecorded prior to his publication.¹³⁴

What distinguished Kenn's study from other accounts of such ceremonies was the presence of firsthand accounts; he himself participated in the ceremonies, was inducted by the kahuna as a priest-practitioner in his tradition, and recorded as much of his experience as he found permissible. He claimed that his instructor, one of a handful of living fire-walkers in all of Polynesia at the time of publication, only agreed to induct him after he sought out a great deal of information on Hawai'i's fire-walking ceremonies on his own and pursued his tutelage repeatedly.¹³⁵ This should sound familiar to you, as a similar obstinance and reluctance to share sacred knowledge was exhibited and extensively justified by Kenn himself when he was sought out to teach Lua in the 1970s. As in that case, the kahuna was hesitant to teach another because much of the knowledge relating to his style of fire-walking was sacred, entailing an intimate relationship between human and akua, and unfit for frivolous use or scrutiny. So closely protected was the tradition that it was effectively hereditary, with each practitioner seldom passing it on to more than one selected other.¹³⁶ Kenn's teacher explicitly stated that he was *afraid* of

¹³⁴ Ibid., 37-44.

¹³⁵ Interestingly, said instructor was also a devout Protestant, and refused to perform fire-walking ceremonies, which in their Hawaiian variant invoke an akua of the moon, at night, as was customary: Ibid., 29. 33. That he still did so, even if by daylight, suggested a type of dueverie.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 35-36.

what the akua would visit upon him if he shared the art beyond his lineage, i.e. flagrantly.¹³⁷

Kenn fire-walked himself, and recorded the supernatural immunity he had sought to document; he described a light tingling in the feet, but no palpable heat; in fact, his soles were seemingly colder than before the firewalk. All of these phenomena were apparently quite common among those granted immunity.¹³⁸ He observed hundreds of others attempt the same practice during his teacher's ceremonies, with the vast majority attaining immunity and a small portion of them failing to, suffering injuries of variable severity. Kenn's hypothesis—and this is an integral part of his Indigenous identity and understanding of the tensions between Kanaka and Western epistemologies—was that concentration was essential to the attainment of immunity, and was the focus of a *spell*. I feel the need to reiterate and stress that absolutely no exaggeration or extrapolation is intended on my part here. In his only monograph, Charles Kenn, leading Hawaiian cultural authority, practitioner and conservator of numerous esoteric Native arts, and champion of obscure knowledge, makes an impassioned case for the existence of magic, and through it the akua of Hawai'i.

Fire-walking did not originate in Hawai'i, and Kenn was patently aware of that fact. He presented a lengthy genealogy of the practice, charting it throughout regional evolutions in Asia and Oceania, and claiming that each adjusted elements of the physical technique and ritual to suit local customs and religions. Hawaiian communities, he

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

explained, historically exhibited a great aptitude for rapid assimilation and modification of exterior elements, the firewalk being no exception.¹³⁹ The Hawaiian firewalk, of course, invoked the akua, and used elements of local flora to beseech them. Beyond the faults in Western analyses outlined above, Kenn asserted the existence of a legitimate supernatural element of fire-walking immunity in part because he, as an experienced kahuna who had interacted with akua in various ritual settings previously, felt a similar sensation to that he associated with their presence during his firewalk.¹⁴⁰ Further, his documentation of certain apparent physical impossibilities—the cooler soles and lack of any physical wounds or reddening of skin—led him to believe that something *beyond the physical* must be involved in the ceremony. How else could standard outcomes of physical stimuli be so routinely subverted in one very specific context?¹⁴¹ The author reserves a great deal of scorn for Western academic (and particularly scientific) attitudes (not systems or practices) at the time, criticizing a general dismissal of Indigenous knowledge systems and sources, and an outsize emphasis on physical materialism that he felt led many studies seeking to *explain* Native practices rooted in the metaphysical to instead aggressively seek to *explain them away*. There was more to the world, he claimed, and more should be done to recognize it.¹⁴² Kenn concludes his study, which also included various small anecdotes about and interviews with participants, by asserting once again the existence of metaphysical entities known to the Kanaka as Hawai‘i’s akua, that their power could be demonstrably used to affect the material world (or the human

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 21-25.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 13-14.

body, at the least), and that the same could and should be galvanized for other positive uses in the future, with further study.¹⁴³

Whether I believe the supernatural claims of Charles Kenn’s monograph, and whether you do, is frankly immaterial. I, personally, feel I have no kuleana to speak on the matter decisively, having never been to Hawai‘i or inducted into the kahunas’ mysteries. What matters here is this: *Charles Kenn believed*. With the quintessence of his heart, one of, if not *the* leading scholarly authority on Hawaiian history and culture in the mid-twentieth century, possessed of a suite of experiences and analytical tools which likely dwarf those possessed by any of his contemporaries, truly believed there was something more to fire-walking. He believed that the akua were real and active in the world. He believed that “old” knowledge—rituals, chants, and mo’olelo among them—could inform and enrich the lives of modern people in manners physical and spiritual. Perhaps most important here, he believed that the academy we inherit and many of us accept uncritically was actively doing harm to thriving Indigenous religious communities by refusing to engage with their beliefs and practices in relative good faith. So firm was this belief that he worked with a very unlikely ally to publish his findings on fire-walking.

Fire-Walking From the Inside was published, officially, by a tiny organization called Huna Research, Incorporated, based on the mainland. Still active in some manner to this day, Huna is an entity with a somewhat misleading name, as much of its activities pertain to religion and the purveyance thereof. Established by a haole man named Maxwell Freedom Long, who also penned a brief foreword for Kenn’s book, Huna (or “the Huna

¹⁴³ Ibid., 45-46.

movement”) is a new religious movement based around very unorthodox readings of Hawaiian and broader Polynesian spiritual traditions, metaphysical research, and psychic power. Suffice to say, the rather traditionalist kahuna and freewheeling haole mystic made for fairly strange bedfellows, but Kenn and Long apparently got on well, leading to a partnership which saw the publication of Kenn’s book.¹⁴⁴

This isn’t to say that Kenn was a subscriber to Long’s ever-evolving Huna ideology, however; according to an academic review, he openly remarked, repeatedly, that despite being a basically good person, Long misunderstood virtually all of the traditions he sought to signal-boost.¹⁴⁵ Long was a problematic figure for accurate storytelling, to be certain; a very robust study into his claims to have been mentored by a Bishop Museum researcher seeking after the secrets of Kanaka mysticism was able to thoroughly debunk them and many of his other supposed credentials as a Hawaiian religious adept.¹⁴⁶ Charles Kenn never found any merit in the Huna movement’s bastardized Kanaka teachings, it would appear. He was no fool—but he believed so strongly in the unrecorded truth of firewalking that he happily partnered with one to spread the word.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 9,

Huna Research Incorporated, “Huna Research Associates Official Web Page”, Cape Girardeau, MO, Date Unknown, Retrieved Sept. 20, 2021, <https://www.angelfire.com/mo/huna/>, Wingo, James Vincent, “The Investigation of HUNA and How It Really Came About,” Ka Huna Nui, 2010, Retrieved Sept. 20, 2021, <http://huna.blogspot.com/2010/04/what-is-huna.html>.

¹⁴⁵ Hall, Lisa Kahaleole, “Hawaiian at Heart and Other Fictions,” *The Contemporary Pacific*, Vol. 19 No. 2, University of Hawai’i Press, Honolulu, HI, 2005, 404-413.

¹⁴⁶ Chai, Makanna Risser, ‘Huna, Max Freedom Long, and the Idealization of William Brigham,” *Hawaiian Journal of History*, Vol. 45, Honolulu, HI, 2011, 101-121.

“I have had no difficulty in understanding and accepting my training in fire-walking. My ordination, or introduction to the conscious beings who preside over the fire-walk, was to me a very real experience. If we are able to pull ourselves up and out of the mire of materialism, and push forward in the field in which we find non-physical consciousness, we well have an opportunity to learn and progress. If we are not, we stand to lose one of our brightest heritages.”

-Charles Kenn, *Fire-Walking From the Inside*¹⁴⁷

Sidebar: Living Treasures of Hawai‘i

Among Charles Kenn’s many accolades, received during and after his life, none was referenced more recurrently in my research than that of Living Treasure of Hawai‘i. Always quite correctly contextualized as one of the most prestigious honors Hawaiian citizens of any descent can receive, the status was afforded Kenn in 1976. This fact was lauded by his local students in their 2006 book on Lua, which cites it as being conferred upon their kupuna by the State of Hawai‘i—understandable, given its considerable prestige.¹⁴⁸ However, this is incorrect.

The Living Treasures of Hawai‘i Program is not administered by the state or any of its organs, but rather by a religious organization with roots outside of the United States and the Kingdom of Hawai‘i—the Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai‘i, a governing body of Buddhist temples and churches associated with a Japanese sect.¹⁴⁹ The mission and its services, religious and civic, predate the annexation of the islands and is unaffiliated with similar actors on the American mainland. Thus, the organization still effectively serves

¹⁴⁷ Tama-iti, Arii-peu (Charles W. Kenn), *Fire-Walking From the Inside*, Huna Research Incorporated, Cape Girardeau, MO, 1949, 46.

¹⁴⁸ Paglinawan, Richard Kekumuikawaiokeola, Mitchell Eli, Moses Elwood Kalauokalani, Kristina Pilaho’ohau’oli Kikuchi-Palenapa, and Jerry Walker, *Lua: Art of the Hawaiian Warrior*, Honolulu, HI, Bishop Museum Press, 2006, 4.

¹⁴⁹ Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai‘i, “History,” Honolulu, HI, Retrieved Sept. 19, 2021, <https://hongwanjihawaii.com/history/>.

as a proselytizing delegation to the Kingdom of Hawai‘i, over a century after its fall.¹⁵⁰ Honpa Hongwanji, while not the only Buddhist organization in the islands, is still incredibly influential, a fact only possible within the overwhelmingly-Christian US due to Hawai‘i’s unique religious history. Roughly 8 percent of Hawai‘i’s population is Buddhist, according to a 2020 survey, and the state is among the most religiously diverse and dynamic regions in the world, with hybrid ethnic, linguistic, and religious identities being acknowledged as possessing an unusual importance within civic and cultural spheres by some research.¹⁵¹

The Hawaiian Living Treasures Program is, itself, a mirror of a very similar initiative originating in Japan, with both intended to recognize and celebrate those respected individuals who possess exceptional character, merit, and have been acknowledged to have a great positive impact on their communities.¹⁵² Similar programs exist in states throughout, sponsored variously by civic organizations and government bodies.¹⁵³ Hawai‘i’s program was launched by Honpa Hongwanji at the suggestion of a real estate agent familiar with a prominent clergyman, with its first inductee, Charles Kenn, being

¹⁵⁰ Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai‘i, “Organizational FAQ,” Honolulu, HI, Retrieved Sept. 19, 2021, <https://hongwanjihawaii.com/organizational-faq/>.

¹⁵¹Asato, Noriko. “Religious Conflict among Hawaii Nikkei and How Japanese Entered the Public School Curriculum, 1896-1924.” *Japanese Language and Literature: The Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese* 42, no. 1 (April 2008): 63–94,

Borup, Jørn. “Aloha Buddha--the Secularization of Ethnic Japanese-American Buddhism.” *Journal of Global Buddhism* 14 (January 2013): 23–43,

“Buddhism by the Numbers: Hawaii.” *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review* 29, no. 4 (Summer 2020): 21,

¹⁵² Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai‘i, “Living Treasures,” Honolulu, HI, Retrieved Sept. 19, 2021, <https://hongwanjihawaii.com/living-treasures/>.

¹⁵³ Aikawa-Faure, Noriko. “Excellence and Authenticity: ‘Living National (Human) Treasures’ in Japan and Korea.” *International Journal of Intangible Heritage* 9 (2014): 38–51.

Maags, Christina. “Struggles of Recognition: Adverse Effects of China’s Living Human Treasures Program.” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 25, no. 8 (August 2019): 780–95.

inaugurated in 1976. Yes, Kenn was the first and only recipient of the honor for a full year, with all but one subsequent cohort—1978’s, which saw the sole inclusion of one Theodore Kelsey—including multiple influential Hawaiians. John Dominis Holt was also awarded the honor, though not until 1979.¹⁵⁴ The recipients are a staggeringly diverse crowd, in demography and vocation. Their number includes politicians, educators, cultural kupuna, and religious leaders, among others.

Honpa Hongwanji’s initiative runs to this day, and has been incredibly influential in the islands, as evidenced by the sheer number of similar “Living Treasure” programs launched by other organizations over the years. The island of Kauai appoints its own living treasures, and a state-endorsed program, administered by the always-controversial Office of Hawaiian Affairs, has awarded living treasure status to at least two cohorts of kupuna over the past five years. Yet another program, sponsored by a consortium of civic organizations, bestowed “Kalani Ali’i” awards upon beloved pillars of the Hawaiian community from 2006-2019, and may well resume this function following the world’s eventual freedom from the threat of COVID-19.¹⁵⁵ All of this is to say that, among scholars and appreciators of Hawaiian cultural and history, the accolade of “living treasure” has come to carry quite a significant meaning, and the Buddhist mission which

¹⁵⁴ Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai’i, “Living Treasures, List of Honorees- Honpa Hongwanji Mission of Hawai’i”, Honolulu, HI, Retrieved Sept. 18, 2021, <https://hongwanjihawaii.com/living-treasures/list-of-honorees/>.

¹⁵⁵ Fujimoto, Dennis, “10 named Living Treasures,” *The Garden Island*, Lihue, HI, 2016, Retrieved Sept. 19, 2021, <https://www.thegardenisland.com/2016/07/14/hawaii-news/10-named-living-treasures/>.
Kalani Ali’i, “Kalani Ali’i Awards,” HI, Retrieved Sept. 19, 2021, <https://www.kalanialii.org/kalani-ali%e2%80%98i-awards/>.

Office of Hawaiian Affairs, “Living Treasures,” Office of Hawaiian Affairs, Honolulu, HI, 2019, Retrieved Sept. 19, 2021, <https://www.oha.org/culture/living-treasures>.

introduced the same has likewise become a beloved and respected public institution, deeply invested in the creation and celebration of the type of multicultural, jubilant Hawai‘i that John Dominis Holt envisioned for the future.

What is most significant to this project, of course, is that Kenn was the first person—and for a time, the *only* person—awarded the honor. Honpa Hongwanji’s recognition indicates that he was so widely admired in the 1970s, having been active in preservation and education for roughly forty years, that Kenn was one of *the* preeminent figures in Hawaiian cultural study and engagement. As will be seen in the following brief section, his status as the most prominent expert in his field was variously upheld by scores of observers throughout his life.

Remembering Uncle Charles: Praise and Recognition of Charles Kenn

As already demonstrated extensively, Charles Kenn was a very widely respected figure throughout his life, near-universally beloved for preserving Hawaiian history, culture, and praxis while making them approachable and accessible to wide audiences—most of the time, at least. He had a seemingly preternatural ability to make friends in diverse arenas, ranging from representatives of the Hawaiian state, to dignified inheritors of religious traditions, to odd characters like professional charlatan Sammy Amalu and eccentric mystic Maxwell Long. This final section will provide a brief overview of the varied praise for Kenn’s character and work in various fields encountered during my research which has not been tangentially displayed thus far. Detailed analysis of Kenn and his work as gestalts will be included in the third and final chapter.

In this chapter's first section, it was briefly mentioned that Charles Kenn played a pivotal role in the conservation of particular types of hula, or Hawaiian dance. He did so through recording audio of many performances, capturing the chants and melodies which accompanied each exhibition, laden with meaning and power alike. As early as 1935, he, as so many Kanaka cultural experts after him, bemoaned the "degeneration" of hula, claiming that a focus on marketability and physicality stripped away a great deal of cultural context which had been inchoate in the artform prior to its commercialization.¹⁵⁶ Thus, Kenn worked to capture and share more authentic or diverse performances where he could. His efforts were acknowledged in the liner notes of a Smithsonian Folkways collection of hula performances, which state that certain pieces contained therein originated as recordings taken by Kenn during his time as Hawaiian activities director.¹⁵⁷ His work in conservation and education, regarding hula as well as countless other facets of Kanaka culture, would be more broadly acknowledged by the Hula Preservation Society in 1984, when the organization selected him as a kupuna to be honored with the title of "Na Makua Mahalo Ia", "The Most Honored". The videotape recording of the Hula Preservation Society ceremony where Kenn, among many other kupuna, were formally acknowledged is the only video of the man I have ever been able to locate.¹⁵⁸

An accolade which allows us to transition perfectly into the analysis and juxtaposition of chapter three can be found alongside a 1978 publication of Kenn's—a simple

¹⁵⁶ Kenn, Charles W., "Ancient Hawaiian Sports and Pastimes", *Mid-Pacific Magazine*, Honolulu, HI, October-December 1935, 308-316.

¹⁵⁷ Tatar, Elizabeth. *Hawaiian Drum DANCE CHANTS: Sounds of Power in Time*. CD. Smithsonian Folkways, 1989.

¹⁵⁸ Hula Preservation Society, "1984 Pt. 2 of 2 Na Makua Award Concert," HI, 1984, Video retrieved Sept. 18, 2021, <https://vimeo.com/255136885>.

translation of a popular anthology of mo'olelo dating, in textual form, back to the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁹ The work had been published in one form or another numerous times, and many of its constituent stories dated back centuries. It was, in other words, a fixture in the Kanaka literary world. Kenn's translation, then—very thorough and accurate, by all accounts—would not make the book worth remarking upon here on its own, as it was just that: a translation. No, what merits discussion here is the publisher and author of the introduction: Topgallant and John Dominis Holt, respectively.

Holt's introduction of Kenn and his body of work is, to say the least, resplendent. He overflows with praise for his elder's incredible bibliography, and is equally complimentary about his cultural literacy, but what is most impressive is the true focus of his commendation: Charles Kenn's remarkable character as a human being. The image painted for the audience is of a distinguished, venerable person who served his community in numerous roles throughout his life; it was from Holt's biography that I learned of Kenn's service on Honolulu's parole board. He also highlights the latter's apparently immaculate work in translating Kanaka poetry into English, contributions to magazines intended for lay or enthusiast audiences, and extensive work for the Kamehameha Schools as a consultant during the 1970s. That his focus in a piece on one of Hawai'i's most accomplished scholars should be his incredible quality as a person says quite a lot about John Dominis Holt, I think. It also does wonders to remind us that scholars—and all professionals, everywhere—are people first and foremost. It also says a great deal about Kenn's character that he was able to elicit publication and such a

¹⁵⁹ Pogue, John Fawcett, Charles W. Kenn, and J. F. Pokuea, *Moolelo of Ancient Hawaii*, Topgallant Pub. Co, Honolulu, HI, 1978, Introduction.

glowing evaluation from someone whose attempt to save family lands just years earlier was halted due in part to his work!

Chapter III: The Beauty of Nuance: Hawaii's Thinkers and Plural Paths Forward

One of the episodes which drove the direction of this project lay in my recent reexamination of a collection of essays published by the recently departed groundbreaking Kanaka political scientist, poet, activist, and general firebrand Haunani-Kay Trask, who, along with her sister Mililani, founded and directed Ka Lahui Hawai'i, an organization dedicated to campaigning for Hawaiian political autonomy and proposing practical models for post-liberation institutional structures. A devotee of Marxist-derived, conflict-centric models of Indigenous resistance, Dr. Trask's stances on Hawaiian prospects, identity, and history frankly could not be more different from those expressed by this project's focal figures. While these will be examined in greater depth in later passages, suffice it to say that the degree to which her assessments diverged from those of her mid-twentieth century counterparts (almost always in a viscerally negative, cynical direction) was rather surprising to me. How could those figures who fought their entire lives (quite literally, in Kenn's case) to preserve practices and knowledge balancing on the precipice of oblivion before their projects of rediscovery come away with far cheerier outlooks on a Kanaka future than an equally-legitimate, equally-respected figure who saw firsthand the benefits of much of their work emerge?¹⁶⁰ A promising answer lies within the premises and experiences upon which they each built their assessments of the *world*.

¹⁶⁰ Eg. Trask, Haunani-Kay. *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005, 65-74, 103-109.

One is not necessarily correct and the others incorrect; rather, they each represent different stances arrived at from wildly different places in the midst of a Kanaka state- and nation-building exercise complicated by the continued presence of a colonial system in the form of the State of Hawai‘i. It is the intent of this chapter to, armed with the content and context for Holt’s and Kenn’s portfolios presented to this point, analyze them for those themes which united them and nuances which distinguished them. It shall also aim to place their unique prescriptions in brief dialogue with other, more modern Kanaka thinkers, such as Trask, to further emphasize the ideological multiplicity which currently exists in the wonderfully rich Kanaka intellectual realm. To this point, much has been presented regarding *what* Holt and Kenn wrote, said, and believed. The following discussion will address, at least in part, *why* they ultimately offered those intellectual products.

Firstly, consider two significant points upon which Holt and Kenn found common epistemic ground; the utility of Western social-scientific disciplines and the legitimacy of Indigenous sources (including oral, musical, non-verbal visual, or kinetic sources) equal to or above Western-style, documentary sources. While a Native Hawaiian educated in Kanaka history and culture, Holt received higher education outside of the islands, at influential American universities. He attended several institutes of postsecondary education on the continent, most notably Columbia University in New York City, but never completed the requirements for a credential. While enrolled, however, he was an ardent student of anthropology, praising the field in his writings for allowing him to

appreciate his culture and race in an “objective, scientific manner.”¹⁶¹ Kenn was educated entirely within Hawai‘i, completing postgraduate studies at the University of Hawai‘i, but in his professional career he taught at several mainland colleges during his time in the American West. In his work, he often lavished praise upon Western (or Western-educated) sociologists, linguists, anthropologists, and historians for their work in Pacific studies, and generally seemed to hold a high opinion of them as colleagues working in well-intentioned disciplines.¹⁶²

That both champions of Hawaiian rediscovery and preservation would speak so highly of Western disciplines—especially in the early/mid-twentieth century—is slightly strange. To be sure, the aforementioned fields were conducting a great deal of research in and around the Pacific at the time, resulting in a hefty volume of texts, but Holt and Kenn’s praise is curious due to the historical context of the disciplines themselves and their activity in the region.¹⁶³ While it likely needs no elaboration in this discussion, the Western social sciences and humanities (along with nearly every branch of the Euro-American academy, really) must contend with a particularly dark history relating to their studies of and workings with Indigenous peoples. It has been well-chronicled by Indigenous intellectuals, activists, and equity-minded Western scholars alike that the arms of academia were engaged in projects intended to discredit Native voices and

¹⁶¹ Holt, John Dominis. *Recollections: Memoirs of John Dominis Holt*. Honolulu: Ku Pa‘a Pub., 1993, 234-235.

¹⁶² Eg. Kenn, Charles W., “Ancient Hawaiian Sports and Pastimes”, *Mid-Pacific Magazine*, Honolulu, HI, October-December 1935, 308-316,

Kenn, Charles W., “How Do You Say Hawai‘i?” *Paradise of the Pacific*, **56**, Honolulu, HI, 1944.

¹⁶³ The Pan-Pacific Union’s periodicals were results of this sort of scholarly gold rush, albeit considerably more amicable towards Native partners than the average Western-style journals of the time.

sources in colonized spheres. These same entities strove to provide legitimacy for imperial projects of assimilation and subjugation for centuries, using frameworks which assumed the relative advancement and objective superiority of Western epistemologies and intellectual concepts to dismiss Indigenous analogues out of hand. While the vast majority of academic practitioners today rightly abhor and seek to rectify the injustice and prejudice associated with the Western academy's past, many of the practices and paradigms which form their foundations have proven difficult to completely dislodge.

The particular difficulties posed to Indigenous intellectual culture by certain social sciences—particularly anthropology and ethnography—were tackled on numerous occasions by the Sioux polymath Vine Deloria Jr., who, like Kenn, was a scholar, religious leader, and champion for Western acceptance of Indigenous ways of knowing. Speaking out against anthropologists—or “anthros”, as he called them—Deloria castigated white American scholars who sought to “study” Native communities through fieldwork and interviews for a flat refusal to actually listen to or seriously engage with the sources of their “subjects.” Writing in the same general era as Holt, he asserted, informed by extensive study and firsthand experience, that the Western scholars who visited Native North American communities seemingly always did so with preconceived notions or entire prefabricated narratives they selectively incorporated information from the actual subject communities into, based largely on the general theories and postulates of their colleagues—not Native people. Deloria was understandably displeased with this, and claimed, quite rightly, that Western scholars who conducted such studies were unconcerned with the advancement or serious evaluation of Indigenous knowledge, and

sought instead to use Native people to serve Western intellectual projects. After anthropologists and their pseudo-research into Indigenous communities, he was perhaps most cross with scholarly publications which gormlessly parroted artificial narratives about noble, vanishing “savages” passing away into history as “civilization” moved west long after *academic research conducted by Indigenous people* disproved them and suggested a more nuanced tapestry of survivances.¹⁶⁴

In the years following Deloria’s publications, Epeli Hau’ofa, Tongan author and educator, examined at length the damage that similar scholarly neglect and abuse had upon the Pacific world. Like Deloria, he asserted, in his characteristically gentle manner, that Indigenous Pacific knowledge and epistemology had found little traction among Western-driven academic circles, many of which had been instrumental in fostering a sense of shame and dissatisfaction among Native peoples of the region by imposing Euro-American standards of progress and development upon their states—finding them wanting, once again.¹⁶⁵ If one wishes for information on the harm Western academia has wrought to the Kanaka specifically, consider again the works of Noenoe Silva, who identified a general lack of Native information and intellectual products in modern Hawaiian curricula, and Haunani Trask, who not only observed a general anti-Native bias and lack of support for Hawaiian studies in the institutional structures and curricula at the

¹⁶⁴ Deloria, Vine Jr., *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, Norman, Oklahoma, University of Oklahoma Press, 1988 (originally published in NY, 1969), 78-100, Deloria, Vine Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*, Golden, Colorado, Fulcrum Publishing Press, 2003 (originally published in NY, 1973), 23-41.

¹⁶⁵Hau’ofa, Epeli, *We Are The Ocean: Selected Works*, Honolulu, Hawai’i, University of Hawai’i Press, 2008, 3-10, 27-40, 110-119.

University of Hawai‘i as late as the 1990s, and recorded accounts of significant discrimination which faced both her and her Kanaka students during the same period.¹⁶⁶

The problematic history of Western disciplines and the Indigenous intellectual demesne thus considered, how, then, may Holt and Kenn’s seemingly welcome attitude towards said disciplines and engagement of them in their own work of Native preservation, celebration, and discovery be explained—especially for Kenn, writing in part at a time when explicit racism still formed the bedrock of certain academic bastions? There are several potential answers suggested by their writings. Firstly, it is possible that they found merit in only part of the studies and fields they cited, and used only those elements they found favorable in their Indigenous projects; Holt, for instance, only wrote that he found his anthropological training “useful” and that it afforded him a different perspective on his culture. While the word “objective” may be a bit disquieting in such a use case, nowhere did he suggest that his Western academic experience formed the foundation of his intellectual framework for the assessment of the Hawaiian past—it was only a component of a more nuanced cerebral apparatus.

It is also possible that Holt and Kenn proved so accepting of Western disciplines and sources in part because of their intended audiences. Both worked vociferously to produce items that spoke to the reality of Kanaka survival and intellectual acumen, but also sought to reach and affect audiences well beyond their own Native community. This was

¹⁶⁶ Silva, Noenoe K. *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007, 3-4, Trask, Haunani-Kay. *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai‘i*. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2005, 151-167.

exhibited by, among other acts, Holt's establishment of the Topgallant publishing house to circulate literature about Hawai'i among lay audiences, Kenn's willingness to write for seemingly any journal, periodical, or cult that would have him, and the investment of each in civic and artistic organizations unrelated to purely academic or Indigenous groups and purposes. In the early years of Holt's and Kenn's careers, Indigenous sources, especially nontextual sources, were difficult to convince academic authorities to take seriously without corroboration from more "conventional" sources familiar to Western epistemology or a scholar in a relevant field. Thus, it is entirely possible that our subjects engaged the work of Western scholars, considered the gold standard for legitimate information at the time, for good or for ill, without compromising their own research or conclusions, which often privileged Native sources in their construction, simply to attain a greater degree of legitimacy and competence in the eyes of their less open audiences. Note also that some audiences, such as those associated with the editorial boards of journals the likes of which Kenn frequented, may have taken issue with a dearth of Western scholarship cited in a piece submitted for their approval, and thus our subjects may have been forced to include an outsized share of such materials in some of their works to reach an audience at all.

Finally, it is worth considering that Western sources are engaged so heavily at certain points in each subject's work because they were simply all of the evidence that was available. Remember that a significant disruption in the chains of inheritance that governed the transmission of Indigenous knowledge was a persistent theme throughout Holt's work on Kanaka culture and history in the monarchial period. He stressed that

rediscovery was only necessary to the extent he asserted because much knowledge was difficult to extract from the kupuna who held it, and thus a great deal of cultural context (such as that required to interpret the meaning of the deific sculptures he catalogued in his volume on featherwork) was already irretrievably lost by the time his studies began.¹⁶⁷ Kenn similarly noted that, until the execution of linguistic studies roughly contemporary with his own life, aspects of the basic pronunciation of ‘olelo Hawai‘i were not well-known or documented, due to a combination of horrible transcription on the part of missionaries who decided to textualize the language, and subsequent careless circulation of an incorrect syllabary.¹⁶⁸ Since such fundamental aspects of the Kanaka identity and experience were still being rediscovered (or, more accurately, shared broadly throughout and beyond the community) in the first decades of the twentieth century, it is possible that Holt and especially Kenn simply had far more accessible, usable Western scholarship at hand when creating many of their pieces, the end result of which often included the rediscovery of some body or subset of Native sources.

While both Holt and Kenn were remarkably quick to engage Western scholarship at length despite any misgivings with some of its premises, they both also strove with great passion to elevate, celebrate, and share Native sources as legitimate and valuable to a wider world. Their canons privileged oral histories, folklore, song, and chant where they could, generally treating Kanaka sources originating beyond the boundaries of the academy with the same seriousness and good faith they showed Western materials. Both

¹⁶⁷ Holt, John Dominis. *The Art of Featherwork in Old Hawai‘i*. Honolulu, Hawai‘i: Ku Pa‘a Pub, 1997, 9, 15.

¹⁶⁸ Kenn, Charles W., “How Do You Say Hawai‘i?” *Paradise of the Pacific*, **56**, Honolulu, HI, 1944.

also briefly addressed the problems of memory and subjectivity in nontextual sources— frequently cited by proponents of Indigenous source marginalization as reasons that Western documentary canons are ostensibly more reliable than nontextual sources—in their work, each essentially arguing that Indigenous sources were almost always transmitted from generation to generation in an atmosphere of seriousness and professionalism, that textual sources were not objectively perfect records of the past, and that practitioners should be happy to work with sources, whatever their form, when they are all that is available pertaining to certain questions or phenomena.¹⁶⁹

The first major theme upon which Holt’s and Kenn’s views appear to strongly diverge to be examined herein is related to the disruption in Indigenous knowledge noticed by Holt as aforementioned. Holt remembered kupuna in and around his family during his rather lavish youth being possessed of knowledge about Hawaiian customs, religion, and history, but many of them being unwilling or merely unmotivated to share it with others. As discussed in the first chapter of this volume, he ascribed several potential causes to this phenomenon, but none more prominently than a deep-seated shame regarding one’s own Indigeneity. Holt believed that after more than a century of material losses due to plague, invasion, and predatory development, along with incessant reinforcement of an image of all things Hawaiian—culture, language, religion, history, and art—as worthless, even harmful things to be discarded by missionaries, their progeny, and allies in Hawaiian government, many Kanaka people had wholly accepted that the culture and

¹⁶⁹ Holt, John Dominis. *Monarchy in Hawaii*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Ku Pa’a Pub., 1995, 17-18, Pogue, John Fawcett, Charles W. Kenn, and J. F. Pokuea, *Moolelo of Ancient Hawaii*, Topgallant Pub. Co, Honolulu, HI, 1978, v-vi.

community into which they were born was an inferior thing to be buried, not celebrated. Therefore, he argued, people *possessed* Indigenous knowledge, but did not happily share it because they either saw no point to doing so or genuinely believed that they and their families had better prospects without it.¹⁷⁰ There is a solid external basis for his claim. Between outright attacks on Indigenous belief and practice in the form of bans and education designed to indoctrinate young children from influential families in Western epistemology alone to the emphasis of rapid logistical development and acculturation, Hawaiian society under the pressures of empire contained many elements which would likely force adherents of Kanaka ways to either abandon them—either out of genuine distaste for them or because, in an increasingly Western-defined sociopolitical climate, they were seen as, at best, quaint cultural heirlooms bereft of real value.

The shame hypothesis in particular has some serious support in broader scholarship of the missionary-besieged Pacific, however. The phenomenon of an externally-imposed disappointment in or revulsion towards one's own Native identity and its associated intellectual heritage actually recurs often in social studies of Polynesian societies. It almost always accompanies discussions of Indigenous spirituality, which suffused many aspects of daily life in said societies, and its prolonged siege under dominionist forces seeking to convert entire kingdoms by suffocating political and cultural plurality. An excellent, lengthy analysis of the shame phenomenon as it pertains to Pacific colonization can be found in a fairly recent article by celebrated author, educator, and monarch Tupua Tamasese Efi, Tui Atua (sovereign ruler of the realm of Atua) of Samoa. Included in an

¹⁷⁰ Holt, John Dominis. *Monarchy in Hawaii*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1995, 14-16, Holt, John Dominis. *On Being Hawaiian*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1995, 7-8. 15.

anthology he curated to assess the broader problem of silence surrounding pre-contact religion and sacred practice in now overwhelmingly Christian¹⁷¹ territories, the piece described a world where many people possessed knowledge of such topics, but would share it with their children or successors only disparagingly, quietly, and with great shame—essentially where Native knowledge was preserved despite the attitudes of Native people, as a sort of obligation to the past, rather than *because* of an attitude of support. The Tui Atua’s conclusion was that missionaries, allowed almost uncontrolled oversight of Samoan religious life by co-opted leaders during periods of imperial activity, successfully convinced a majority of the Samoan people that all they were and did was so profane—so *foul*—that it had no place in the intellectual landscape of decent, mature people. Their result was a generations-spanning sociocultural stigma associated with frank discussion of the Samoan people’s intellectual heritage, accepted by a majority of the state’s people to this day. Of course, not all Samoans bought into the missionary-induced erasure campaign, as the work of the Tui Atua and his colleagues proves.¹⁷²

So there exists some evidence for shame playing a critical role in the muffling of Kanaka knowledge in imperial Hawai‘i, and some for a broader regional pattern for such phenomena. However, Charles Kenn’s work suggests another, wholly internal cause for non-engagement with the Kanaka past—one based not on shame, but a great reverence

¹⁷¹ Remember, many of the churches established in the Pacific by missionary orders were ideologically extreme by the standards of their broader denominational groups, prone to authoritarian rhetoric and fond of prescriptions for uniformity in many areas of their adherents’ lives.

¹⁷² Efi, Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese Ta’isi, “Whispers and Vanities in Samoan Indigenous Religious Culture,” in Sua’ali’i-Sauni, Tamasese, Mauaivaio Albert Wendt, Vitolia Mo’a, Naomi Fuamatu, Upolu Luma Va’ai, Reina Whitiri, and Stephen L. Filipo. *Whispers and Vanities: Samoan Indigenous Knowledge and Religion*. 2014.

for the people's spiritual and intellectual past. Recall that his fire-walking instructor, a devout Protestant Christian who modified his ceremonies to avoid *explicit* acknowledgement of the akua of the moon known to oversee such, refused to freely share his rites—of which he was one of the last living initiates at the time—for a reason other than revulsion or shame about said rites' origins in Native religion and culture. He refused because he was afraid of *disrespecting the akua by treating sacred knowledge in a leisurely manner or running the risk of someone performing a rite incorrectly*. Despite his religion, then, the man seemed to believe in the akua as well, and have such reverence for them—or at least their power—that he suppressed his specialized, endangered knowledge to prevent its and the akua's abuse or disrespect. This notion seemed rather understandable to Kenn, who sought out what knowledge he could and presented it competently in order to demonstrate to his instructor that he could be trusted to receive sacred, powerful, and dangerous Kanaka knowledge.

Kenn himself exhibited a similar attitude regarding the gatekeeping of endangered information in his dealings with prospective Lua students. Despite being one of a scant few masters at the time of his first class' formation, he adamantly refused to share the greater part of his knowledge until his pupils demonstrated a noble heritage through mo'oku'auhau, trained the same handful of basic maneuvers for hours a week, attended every grueling session he called, and meet several other criteria. Such an attitude was not motivated by a desire to preserve knowledge, but rather to preserve it in a certain way and with a certain application in mind. He urged his successors—the masters he acknowledged from among his students—to share Lua with other eligible Kanaka people,

but also constantly reminded them to preserve a conceptual “core” that defined the discipline beyond its physical elements; he warned against the artform being perverted or mutated into something it was not by avaricious or improper instruction. His reluctance to share, then, was at least partially motivated by a strong desire to ensure that sacred, living Indigenous knowledge was respected and understood holistically before it was preserved. Kenn’s attitude, though, may well have been sufficient for Holt to lump him in with those who just did not want to share out of apathy or shame; we have no way of knowing how his reluctance to teach manifested itself was understood by those he turned away.¹⁷³ What is evident from Kenn’s writings, however, is that many Kanaka people hid or otherwise downplayed certain Indigenous intellectual products for reasons other than externally-imposed shame or apathy, and, as Kenn himself observes in his treatise on fire-walking, said reasons, with origins in Native culture and praxis, require a more nuanced approach to circumvent. It would also suggest that some would be better off left alone; such would be demonstrative of proper respect paid the inheritors of sacred knowledge.

Another point of divergence between Holt and Kenn’s outlook on Hawaiian identity and heritage can be found in their general evaluations and descriptions of Indigenous knowledge, practices, and history as exhibited in their writings. At the inception of this chapter, I had originally intended to contrast Holt and Kenn as presenting a comprehensive theory and comprehensive praxis of Hawaiianness in the post-annexation era. My evidential foundations were as follows: Holt frequently relayed specific episodes

¹⁷³ Paglinawan, Richard Kekumuikawaiokeola, Mitchell Eli, Moses Elwood Kalauokalani, Kristina Pilaho’ohau’oli Kikuchi-Palenapa, and Jerry Walker, *Lua: Art of the Hawaiian Warrior*, Honolulu, HI, Bishop Museum Press, 2006, 2-6.

from Hawai‘i’s monarchial period or his personal experiences with Kanaka family members, friends, and colleagues. However, the focus of his notion of Indigenous identity remained an immaterial concept—an idea— throughout his works cited herein. He spent considerable amounts of time and space on pondering the significance of certain stories and events on an evolving Hawaiian identity, and what *Hawaiian* even meant to a Kanaka or part-Kanaka person in the mid-twentieth century. Having produced a short essay entirely dedicated to the subject, Holt seemed to have understood Kanaka identity to be something that was ever-changing, defined by consistent values and various experiences, expressed and comprehended as different ideas by different people in different contexts, but joined together by intellectual mo‘oku‘auhau.

Kenn, on the other hand, devoted practically all of his adult life to advancing a notion of Hawaiian identity as something one *does* as much as *feels* or simply *is*. Focused on material practices and their ideological significance to a broader Kanaka culture, his work defined Kanakaness largely in terms of activities and colloquial understandings of the significance of the same. From sport and song to warfare and ritual, Kenn’s core of Kanaka identity always appeared correlated to a way of living more than a simple ethnic and epistemic heritage or state of mind. Thus, the core of this chapter was originally to be the simple contrast of thought and action in defining Indigenous Hawaiian identity. Certainly, such a juxtaposition is one perspective from which Holt’s and Kenn’s products described herein can be analyzed.

However, inspired jointly by a comment on characteristics which distinguished the men from one another made by the chair of this committee and the inclusion of additional

themes and points of contrast in this chapter, this discussion will now introduce another, perhaps more compelling, potential explanation for the ideological variance between its subjects' attitudes towards Hawaiian identity and preservation. Please consider the two men and their demographics as outlined in their respective chapters.

John Dominis Holt was born in 1919, an aristocrat of a line no longer attached to a monarchy and faced with predatory outsiders aiming for its lands; incredibly privileged, yes, but also in a world of constant uncertainty and colored by experiences of material, cultural, and social losses imposed by criminals who overthrew the Hawaiian Kingdom. Many of the stories, concepts, and values he associated with Hawaiian identity were relayed to him by the same family kupuna who had been subject to great abuses at the hands of the colonial system and its economic apparatuses. They, accordingly, filled John's mind with florid images of an Indigenous, proud Hawai'i that *was*, but was recently lost to the haole. The language, customs, and knowledge tied to that idealized kingdom survived in his elders, but none of them wholly intact, thanks to shame, suppression, and apathy. Holt's "authentic" Hawai'i always existed in the past tense for him; development, colonization, and intellectual siege at the hands of Euro-American entities had both destroyed the Hawaiian state—a vector of Indigenous knowledge, power, and consensus which allowed the sustenance of his ideal Native values and practices—and left the old Kanaka elite without a central font of Indigenous authority to derive legitimacy or meaning from, rendering rediscovery a personal or family project. Such projects, he noted, were far less popular than indulgence in vice or inaction due to a

resigned belief that “haoles *got it*.”¹⁷⁴ Holt’s idealized Hawai‘i, then, did not exist in the present for him—nor could it. He postulated reluctantly that the island culture and history he was raised on and so adored would likely be variously transformed, recontextualized, and forgotten by generations farther removed from the overthrow.¹⁷⁵ To Holt, the core elements of “authentic” Kanaka intellectual and material culture had been endangered and left in stasis following the overthrow of Queen Liliuokalani and rapid Westernization of the nineteenth century; they could be meticulously and swiftly preserved, as tossing a melting ice sculpture into a freezer, or could be allowed to transform (degrade?) into something else entirely, but could not quite be restored as such. Kanakaness, then, was something Holt located firmly but proudly in the past—the realm of heritage and imagination. As much as he loved the world he grew up with stories of, he knew he could never see it in this life, and his descendants could never quite see his—though that didn’t mean that their world would be worse at all.

Holt’s expressions of Indigenous Hawaiian identity and prospects, pensive and nostalgic, contrasts sharply with those offered by Kenn. Born nearly a full generation earlier than Holt, in 1907, and began writing substantially earlier, being recognized as a leading cultural expert as early as the 1930s. He also, while descended from ali‘i, was not possessed of the privilege or wealth that characterized the communities Holt was most accustomed to, living in a modest apartment towards the end of his career.¹⁷⁶ Kenn was

¹⁷⁴ Holt, John Dominis. *On Being Hawaiian*. Honolulu, Hawaii: Ku Pa'a Pub., 1995, 8.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 18-21.

¹⁷⁶ Paglinawan, Richard Kekumuikawaiokeola, Mitchell Eli, Moses Elwood Kalauokalani, Kristina Pilaho’ohau’oli Kikuchi-Palenapa, and Jerry Walker, *Lua: Art of the Hawaiian Warrior*, Honolulu, HI, Bishop Museum Press, 2006, 3.

also a *practitioner* of numerous Native arts and rituals, and an active agent of preservation happy to work with governmental, academic, and independent parties alike to share Kanaka knowledge he bore firsthand experience with practical application of. Kenn was also involved, physically, mentally, and spiritually in the active rediscovery of Kanaka heritage and identity throughout his life, teaching, preaching, and participating in complex rituals to explore his culture and share his findings with varied audiences.

There are two important points of distinction to make between Holt and Kenn based on the information above. Firstly, Kenn did not grow up in a world of broken aristocracy obsessively fixated on a time before loss. His circumstances were relatively humble, in fact. Based upon Holt's extreme romanticization of those Kanaka elders he met in childhood whom he considered to be most "authentic" to the old ways,¹⁷⁷ all of whom were from middle and working-class backgrounds, it would be reasonable to assume that Kenn's distance from the Kanaka aristocracy may have afforded him a greater measure of exposure to Native practices and ideas as they were lived by people who still valued them and saw them as things of the *present*, kingdom and land be damned. This would also mean that instead of Holt's community's strong association of Kanakaness with the past, loss, and nostalgia, Kenn may well have been reared in an environment where Kanaka identity was performed and appreciated in a relatively vital manner as, again, a thing surviving and important in the present.

¹⁷⁷ Those who favored 'olelo Hawai'i, remembered and freely spoke of the kingdom and its Indigenous rulers, and retained Kanaka dress, practice, and spirituality in Holt's depictions.

Second, consider that John Holt always saw himself as an eager student of his homeland's past, but not, perhaps, a significant force in living its cultural or intellectual products in the present—that job, he asserted time and again, seemed to belong to those kupuna who he learned from, directly and indirectly. He reported on and shared their work in Kanaka art, narrative, and ritual, but never practiced creation of the same, beyond a series of fictions for press and stage written in Western styles with some inclusion of Kanaka themes. Kenn, by contrast, was a practicing master of Lua, fire-walking, and Indigenous religious rites. He socialized with leading practitioners of Hula and mo'olelo, and attempted to understand their crafts as they were *lived*. In this way also, Kenn's work could be argued to be more *present* and *vital* in its construction than Holt's. Kenn's relative presentism also likely made it easier for him to insist on “keeping the core” of Indigenous disciplines and ideas; if those things were *still present* in a particular context in Hawai'i, then it made sense, and was demonstrative of the respect they deserved, to preserve them in the form which they had been understood to take and derive significance from for generations, even if doing so was difficult, obtrusive, or unpleasant.

The conclusion these points allow one to arrive at, and the principal interpretative distinction made between Holt's and Kenn's epistemology in this discussion, is as follows: Holt wished to preserve and celebrate a past-tense Indigeneity informed by narratives of loss, but also narratives of wonder, power, and pride inherited from his culture's kupuna. Kenn, meanwhile, was the *very image* of the kupuna Holt idealized—a wise, well-traveled polymath possessed of the context and knowledge requisite to *practice* Indigeneity in various forms and in the present tense. Funnily enough, this

allowed Kenn to see a far more vital and present Indigenous Hawai‘i than Holt did, and therefore to argue for less readily-accessible information pertaining to certain facets of the Kanaka past as cultural context demanded, as Kanaka identity and intellectual culture wasn’t quite so close to complete erasure. Kenn *was* the venerable kupuna, and “old Hawai‘i” was still present, if not advertised, all throughout the islands.

This epistemic distinction allows one to further contextualize Holt and Kenn’s conflict over the Moanalua historic significance application.¹⁷⁸ For Holt, for whom Hawaiian history was both deeply personal and in great peril of being transformed, if not lost, the rediscovery of the Damon family diaries which ascribed great, singular significance to the Moanalua Valley would have been very compelling; only one source suggesting a great untold history to the place existed, and any opportunity to further preserve and investigate it would be lost forever if some preventative action was not taken. For Kenn, who made it his business to seek out living Hawaiian history and culture wherever he could, a broader Kanaka historical lens was more convincing. He personally knew experts on the area’s Indigenous history, and saw respect for what Kanaka histories there *were* as more important than acting in defense of spurious claims borne out by neither Western or Kanaka narratives, and thus had no problem in dismissing the Damon sources as inaccurate. Moanalua’s Hawaiian history had not been discovered in the Damon chronicles; *it already had one which was known by the Kanaka had survived into the twentieth century*, and that history proved the Damon/Holt claims plainly false.

¹⁷⁸ If one completely rules out the influence of a profit motive or other more personal impetuses for Holt and the Damon family, of course.

So, then, despite broadly agreeing on the utility, value, and beauty of a Hawaiian intellectual culture independent from and stronger without Western empire and suppression, Holt and Kenn differed wildly on the details of how such a culture manifested itself in the post-annexation era, how it was preserved to that point, how it should be preserved in the future they attempted to divine, and what Kanaka people should take (and be able to take) from their predecessors and the foreigners who had come to call the islands home. This is exactly the type of ideological nuance which inspired the project at hand; a policymaker tasked with overseeing some campaign for public preservation could very easily cobble together a suite of programs and initiatives inspired by a deep reading of Holt's work for values, best practices, and ends for Hawaiian intellectual and cultural sustenance, but enacting such would invariably violate Kenn's analogues, and vice versa. With both men considered leading experts on both the broad topics of Kanaka history and survival and, more specifically, the preservation of knowledge in a colonized world, can one be said to have offered a more viable or beneficial scheme of approach for Kanaka people and their partners? Is one set of observations and prescriptions superior to the other? Can we make such a claim? Well, let's complicate the matter further by considering briefly the variance in perspective among those scholars who were deeply impacted by the type of work Holt and Kenn performed.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ Please note: the two profiles of leading Kanaka thinkers and their products which follow are necessarily very brief and general. More comprehensive biographies of each and reflections on their work fall beyond the intended scope of this project, but have been produced by scholars and observers in the press and general audiences alike in the last decades.

Consider the stances of George Hu'e'u Sanford Kanahale, a Kanaka entrepreneur, educator, and cultural critic who studied business in Polynesia and contemporary Kanaka identity and values from a social-scientific perspective, in addition to writing regularly on Hawaiian music and song. In writing a 1986 text on Kanaka cultural values aimed at extracting a “primal,” universal identity characteristic of Hawaiian people throughout time, he relied upon a number of rigorous surveys conducted at workshops on Kanaka heritage an organization he was affiliated with hosted across the islands.¹⁸⁰ While predicated upon self-reporting among those who attended said events, and thus perhaps capturing certain subsets of the Kanaka population disproportionately, Kanahale’s work was rightly commended for bringing a massive amount of data into a consideration of those concepts deemed particularly integral to a modern Kanaka identity; Holt, for instance, issued a glowing review of the volume upon its publication.¹⁸¹ The surveys identified certain values, including uniquely Kanaka cultural perceptions of spirituality, intelligence, diligence, leadership, and cooperativeness as chiefly informative to respondents’ Native identities, and many of the same as being ascribed particular importance to Kanaka communities in historical records. Kanahale’s perspective on post-annexation Kanaka prospects was similar to Holt’s in broad strokes, blaming a generations-spanning, externally-imposed notion of shame and negative stereotypes for destroying collective Native confidence in inherited knowledge and sense of self, and hopefully appraising a modern era where young people are willing and eager to learn

¹⁸⁰ Kanahale, George Hu'e'i Sanford. *Kū Kanaka, Stand Tall: A Search for Hawaiian Values*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986, 6-12, 18-21.

¹⁸¹ John Dominis Holt, “Book Review: Ku Kanaka, Stand Tall: A Search for Hawaiian Values, by George Hu'e'u Sanford Kanahale,” *Hawaiian Journal of History*, **21**, Honolulu, Hawai'i, 1987, 158-160.

Indigenous knowledge, and their elders willing and eager to share. What most distinguishes his outlook from Holt's, though—and places it far from Kenn's—are an even greater willingness to accommodate the radical transformation of Indigenous knowledge, epistemology, and identity in a post-annexation world and a desire to, in part, provide legitimacy to Indigenous knowledge by reconciling it directly with Western intellectual culture and science.¹⁸² Kanahale describes the cultural reaction to European arrival and assertion within the islands to one of great change, made easily by some and with difficulty by others, and as a thing which was not necessarily all bad (again, similar to Holt's evaluation), but also contended that further cultural change, still marked by synthesis with Western systems and ideas, would affect the Kanaka population of the future—and that this would not necessarily be undesirable or preventable. So long as Hawaiian people maintained their identity, anchored in immaterial values, they would effectively preserve their culture, as the *sprit* and *ethos* of the people effectively *defined* the people in his framework. This is a marked diversion from Holt, who argued for keeping what elements of material and intellectual culture one could while accepting that additional synthesis or change may happen, and Kenn, who advocated “keeping the core” of things Hawaiian to preserve their significance, no matter the context of the wider world. Kanahale's willingness to embrace Western business and tourism (along with change as a whole) as beneficial for Kanaka people if engaged properly would also have likely alienated his views from those of our subjects, both of whom strongly opposed the

¹⁸² Kanahale, George Hu'e'i Sanford. *Kū Kanaka, Stand Tall: A Search for Hawaiian Values*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986, 139-146, 213-231.

predatory, rapid development Western concerns brought to the islands in the twentieth century.¹⁸³

To stand in complete contrast to the affable, relatively accommodationist Kanahele, consider Haunani Trask, who has been mentioned in passing several times before. A poet, teacher, and political activist formally trained in political science on the continent, Trask published most of her written work in the 1980s and 1990s, hosting local television programs and seminars regularly throughout the period. Standing completely at odds with the other thinkers cited herein, Trask's products roil with a palpable anger and antagonism—towards imperials, the systems which support them, and those Indigenous people who collaborate with them. Writing in the 90s, Trask saw a far more eschatological future for the Kanaka than any of the others discussed in this document; in a way simpler than the models outlined previously, she saw the Kanaka as one of many Indigenous peoples locked in an existential struggle with imperial forces intent on their complete assimilation or erasure, projects still ongoing at the time of her writing. Political subjugation and dominance was the imperial aim in her view, and so vociferous, incessant political activism and resistance on the part of colonized people throughout Hawai'i (and, indeed, the world) was the only possible path for long-term preservation.¹⁸⁴ Trask's essays provide copious amounts of well-researched and quantified information regarding the incredible damage done to Hawai'i and its Indigenous population as a result of imperial adventures, but her ideas regarding Indigeneity as it pertains to the foci of this

¹⁸³ Ibid., 383-393, 493-497.

¹⁸⁴ Trask, Haunani-Kay. *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005, 2-19.

project were really rather simple. Deterministic, racialized, and centered entirely around conflict in its various forms, her stances, informed by Marxist-derived theories of Native struggle as developed and applied as a paradigm elsewhere, held that the very nature and goal of white empires were to predate upon colonized people of color to the very last, such processes were ongoing in Hawai‘i, and there was absolutely no way to prevent them aside from political action which wrested all control away from colonial agents; otherwise, they would eventually, by some means or another, erase the Kanaka people and/or identity from the isles. Suffice it to say, Trask did not exactly share Holt’s vision of an apolitical, multiracial Hawai‘i happily inhabited by people respectful of and eager to learn about each other’s unique cultures and pasts, nor did she share Kenn’s willingness to work with imperial institutions in projects of long-term preservation (rather, she was quick to decry those who collaborated with or worked within “puppet-haole” government institutions). Her ideology stood in particular contrast to Kanahēle’s, as she frequently fulminated Kanaka people who “prostituted” themselves and their culture by working in tourism or other industries dealing in commercialized and idealized versions of Indigenous products and society for consumption by affluent outsiders.¹⁸⁵ Among the factors which motivated Trask’s rather harsh assessments of people, institutions, and the wider world was a powerful desire to create a society wherein Indigenous Hawaiian (and, more broadly, *all* Indigenous) knowledge and culture needn’t be thoughtfully, carefully preserved, as they would face no severe existential threats. That

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 136-146.

said, the same assessments place her school of thought firmly at odds with those presented by the other thinkers documented herein—on the surface, at least.

While it is difficult to qualitatively evaluate the outlooks on Kanaka identity, preservation, and prospect presented by Holt, Kenn, Kanahele, and Trask (as will be discussed shortly), there are some schema available from scholars of Indigeneity which can assist in the comprehension of some of the differences apparent between them. Subaltern expert Partha Chatterjee argued for a paradigm of colonial and post-colonial organization wherein Indigenous peoples located power in realms other than the political—in informal social, cultural, or religious gatherings, institutions, and practices, for instance. Thus, the *core* of the people—that thing or things which they understood to make the community and culture what they were and provide cohesion— could take a form apart from a government which monopolized legitimate application of force within a defined geographical area. Noenoe Silva believed such a distinction, which allowed subject peoples to retain their identity and national sovereignty as internally defined, even if made politically and economically subject to another power, applied to the Kanaka of the overthrow and annexation periods.¹⁸⁶ If applied to the four thinkers discussed in this chapter, such a concept allows for explanation of several epistemic differences. Holt, Kenn, and Kanahele all held Kanaka loci of identity and power to exist beyond a state or political organization, though they located it in various realms: art, shared history, and land for Holt, practice, tradition, and protocol for Kenn, and ephemeral values which

¹⁸⁶ Chatterjee, Partha, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1993, 6.

Silva, Noenoe K. *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007, 7.

collectively constituted a Kanaka “spirit” for Kanahēle (there is, of course, overlap, but these seem to be the areas each focused on most frequently or intently when asserting Kanaka identity). Each could survive without Kanaka political autonomy—and should, in Holt’s argument. Trask, by contrast, firmly believed that Kanaka identity was political; it was politicized by haole government that put in place policies to define and suppress it, and thus Kanaka culture and existence could only be perpetuated through action in the pursuit of political autonomy. Certainly other spheres of life mattered, but none would or could exist without a centrally-located notion of the Indigenous as political. Thus applied, Chatterjee’s model actually does a great deal to explain the epistemic gulf between Trask and her fellows.

Another way in which Indigenous scholarship allows for more nuanced appreciation of the distinctions between the perspectives outlined above comes from the seminal work *Decolonizing Methodologies* by Maori academic and administrator Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Explicitly interested in the harmful ways Western epistemologies and their entrenchment in academic practice and theory have harmed Indigenous people and the proposition of alternatives based in and friendly to diverse subject communities, one chapter in the volume presents a litany of practical, subject-focused goals Indigenous research and intellectual products could meet, not all of which conform to the purely informational or investigative norms (often falsely) associated with Western protocol. Some scholarship could, for instance, exist to help voice and validate grievance, heal epistemic and psychic wounds communities sustained at the hands of Western intellectual organs and policies, or simply to celebrate Indigenous survival; the goal needn’t always be to explain

something to an ignorant audience, and not all scholarship most serve the same purposes to all people.¹⁸⁷ Our subjects' portfolios and unique messaging on Hawaiian prospects can thus be seen as serving different purposes identified in Tuhiwai Smith's paradigm; Holt exemplified the centering of Native testimony, storytelling, and revitalization, Kenn championed the legitimization of Hawaiian methods, processes, and practices, Trask's body of work focused, on processes of healing through the voicing of Indigenous grief and reckoning with vast material pain, and Kanahele's celebrated survival of Kanaka people and their collective spirit (again, there exists overlap here, but those areas and themes engaged by each to distinguish their work have been highlighted). Understood thusly, each scholar's perspective could be seen as informing a different facet of a gestalt Indigenous identity encompassing all of them and more, without conflict or cognitive dissonance. Such a holistic approach would easily be the simplest way to reconcile an analysis of Kenn and Holt's perspectives (let alone those of Kanahele and Trask) without declaring one superior to the other(s).

¹⁸⁷ Smith, Linda Tuhiwai, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Dunedin, New Zealand, Otago University Press, 2012, 121, 143-163.

Afterword

This leaves this discussion with one significant question to address: should one Indigenous perspective on Indigeneity or direction for a given community, even if buttressed by a greater body of evidence, be evaluated as “better” or “preferable” from an academic standpoint? For the sake of simplicity or rhetoric, can we broadly associate the most popular, most defensible, or most compelling of them to a group as a whole? For what it’s worth, I don’t believe so.

This project was born out of a combination of fascination with mid-twentieth century Kanaka intellectual culture and the unexpected material restrictions of a global pandemic. At its inception, it was to be a sleek, manageable, and hopefully trenchant evaluation of the ways in which Kanaka intellectual products and values evolved throughout the period between annexation and the second “Hawaiian Renaissance” of the late 1960s and 1970s. What it became was a fascinating journey through the century as experienced, remembered, and explained by two very different champions of Kanaka culture, who perceived their role and the future of their community quite differently. A theme which quickly became integral to my personal reading of relevant source material was nuance—the little distinctions and points of disagreement which set one set of views or body of work apart from others. As with any culture’s intellectual world, the realm of Kanaka thinkers is inundated with nuance—regarding what elements from the past should persist, whether they *were* legitimately part of a shared past, how and whether to coexist with a wider world, where the loci of Kanaka identity lie within the realms of the community’s

organization, and how those should be protected and asserted within a post-annexation world.

I am utterly convinced that to tell a story well, one must be willing to incorporate and illuminate nuance where it exists; this is doubly important for discussion of instances where that nuance, such as in the state- and nation-building exercises undergone by the Kanaka and countless other colonized peoples, has a very real, major impact on potential political, social, and intellectual outcomes. Is it safe, or, in fact, responsible to declare one mode of thinking objectively or broadly correct—broadly “Kanaka” in a way others aren’t—and ascribe it to the people as a whole? Is it, when Holt, Kenn, Kanahele, and Trask were all at one time writing and working as contemporaries, influencing audiences, Kanaka and haole alike, who found each of them inspiring and compelling, despite their differing and atimes contradictory prescriptions? I do not think so. Rather, the most that an academic product intended to explore and explain from the outside can do is acknowledge that the nuance—the intellectual diversity and shared legitimacy wrought from audience approval—is there, and to strive to explain it as best as is possible.

The figures chronicled in this documents first two chapters are hardly the only Kanaka intellectuals celebrated for their roles in preserving and sharing their culture with others during a time of turmoil preceding the second “Hawaiian Renaissance”; an entire monograph or more could be filled with essays examining and comparing the thought of Holt, Kenn, Kanahele, Trask, Winona Beamer, Prince Kuhio, ‘Iolani Luahine, and any number of other Kanaka champions from the period. This is something I may dedicate

time to in the future, should my desire to write ever return after the absolute marathon the manuscript you read has been!

A more serious and manageable avenue for future research, should the climate and logistics allow for it, would be a detailed biography of Charles Kenn. While he wrote and taught at a prolific level for decades, little has been written of the man himself. Exploration of his family, upbringing, and instructors in Hawaiian culture and practice would form a fascinating project, to be sure. What's more, such a project would allow for a brighter spotlight to be shone upon one of Hawai'i's lesser-known heroes of Indigeneity and, more broadly, education.

As a simple parting thought, I offer the following: to understand the formation of the intellectual nuance and difference that suffuses this project's subjects, we have to understand a simple facet of the processes which inform the histories we write and the stories we tell ourselves *about* ourselves. Each of us is surrounded with disjoint fragments of many pasts: "official" nation- or state-based histories, life stories of family members, partners, friends, and colleagues, the lores of institutions, communities, and cultures, and religious dogma, to name but a few forms these fragments can take. Each can be read or interpreted in manifold ways, and synthesized with others to create unique epistemic premises, or ways of thinking about and viewing the world around us. It's so important to consider and appreciate the way we gather and combine these fragments into gestalt worldviews, because in so doing, each of us chooses, every day, the parts of our individual and collective pasts to bring with us forward into the present.

I see it fit to conclude this document not with my own words, but those of one of our subjects. What follows is a powerful and touching excerpt from a short, one-page essay Charles Kenn published in an issue of *Paradise of the Pacific* during 1936.

“Superimposition and education were brought about without regard for the elements in my peoples’ [sic] culture that were worth saving. I am still a Hawaiian and I am proud of it. I am no different from you. Our differences lie chiefly in our skin color which is environmental. You have taught me that the same god created both you and me in his likeness. I have a heart just like you, and sometimes it aches, just like yours. I also have joys, and disappointments and so do you. I have ambitions too, since your arrival. You have taught me that no one race is imbued with all the virtues of mankind; that neither has any one race the monopoly on the vices of mankind—that there are good and bad in every race, and that what really matters is the kind of persons we are.... I do not want to become a sorry white man. I want to retain some of my own individuality. I want to know something about my own people, and I want to retain that knowledge for posterity.... We want you to remove certain obstacles in our way that is in your power to remove. In my own native language, he kanaka Amelika wau. He oiwi Hawaii au. E hoaloha paha kaku. I am an American. I am a Hawaiian. Let us be friends.”

-Charles Kenn, “I Am A Hawaiian”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Kenn, Charles W., “I Am A Hawaiian,” *Paradise of the Pacific*, Honolulu, HI, November 1936, 21

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