

Hawaiian: An Endangered Culture

Haole influence jeopardizes entire life-style

IT WAS JUNE 2, 1893, in the district of Kohala on the Island of Hawaii. A newborn baby girl was about to be *hanai'd*. Hanai is Hawaiian for adopt. Akaka Stewart was going to be adopted by Puamana, her grandfather's sister. Akaka was neither illegitimate nor orphaned. She was the third child of Julia Manu and her husband, Charles Stewart. Julia's aunt had no children. Julia had two. She was fond of Puamana and early in her pregnancy had promised her baby to her aunt.

What greater way to show your love for someone than to give that person your own child? The hanai system has been part of the Hawaiian culture for generations. It's not a case of a neglected baby needing a home, it's a question of a home which needs a baby. Traditionally the firstborn son of a man's eldest son is hanai'd back to the grandfather. This is not uncommon in Hawaiian families today.

Akaka's father was not Hawaiian, but Scotch, and unfamiliar with the hanai custom. The fiery wrath of Pele, Goddess of the Volcano, is probably no more furious than was Charles Stewart when he discovered that his wife had promised away his baby.

Akaka is today an alert and gracious 82-year-old woman with graceful hands and long arms which gesture expressively to punctuate her fluent speech. She lives alone in a small frame house surrounded by tropical ferns, palms, ginger, and heliconia. When I visited her home she greeted me warmly and willingly shared fond memories of her life in earlier years. She talked easily about being hanai'd.

"When it was time for me to be born, my father couldn't understand why my grandfather's sister was hanging around our house. He hadn't invited her. My mother wasn't trying to hide something from my father. She just didn't think to tell him. But from then on he never let another child be hanai'd."

Charles managed to keep his baby girl at home for a time, but to a Hawaiian a promise made is a promise kept, and at the age of five months Akaka went to live with her hanai parents, Puamana and Kawelo. A few years later the couple hanai'd one of Akaka's cousins. The two children grew up as brother and sister.

Akaka remembers as a small child being perched on a tiny pillow in front of

Kawelo's saddle and cantering off to the home of her real parents, because Charles Stewart insisted on occasional visits from his daughter. The Kawelo family spoke only Hawaiian. "My real parents spoke *Haole*," Akaka said. "Sometimes I had trouble understanding them."

Haole literally means foreigner, but is commonly used as a synonym for Caucasian, and when denoting language, refers to



A native woman fishes for shrimp in the days when life revolved around the sea and the land - 1898, Napoopoo, Hawaii.

Photos courtesy of the Bernice P. Bishop Museum

English.

Young Akaka was forced to learn English at the age of seven, when she was sent to a Girls' Seminary. Here students caught speaking Hawaiian were severely punished. Teachers in public and private schools at that time were adamant in their insistence that Hawaiian not be spoken. As a result, several generations of Hawaiians have

grown up unable to speak or understand their own language. Kawaiahao Church on Oahu holds services in English and Hawaiian, but with the exception of the Island of Niihau and isolated pockets of Hawaiian on Maui, Molokai, and Hawaii, the language is spoken by very few, usually the elderly. There are only five teachers of Hawaiian in the state's 220 public schools.

The lilting, melodic language is not the only part of the Hawaiian culture in danger of dying. An entire life-style, on which Polynesians thrived for over a thousand years, has been dangerously eroded during the last two centuries.

Ancient Hawaiians were completely self-sufficient. Isolated in the middle of the vast Pacific, unable to trade with the out-

Waikiki Beach in 1915 (right) provided space for sunbathers and an unimpeded view of Diamond Head. Below, a Hawaiian family poses in front of their palm-thatched house, typical of Hawaiian homes in the early 1900s.



side world, they relied on their local environment for all their needs—food, clothing, shelter, and material possessions.

The *alii* (royalty) held large divisions of land, known as *ahupua'as*, which usually extended from the mountains, where crops were grown and dense forests provided lumber for canoes, to the sea, which held an abundant supply of food. All elements of the *ahupua'a* were interdependent.

At certain times of the year the *kahuna* (priest) would tie a piece of *kapa* (tapa) to coconut palms along the shore. This indicated that fishing was prohibited, thus giving the tiny spawn a chance to grow and the

seaweed time to replenish itself. Taro patches were allowed to lie fallow a year or more at a time. Wise resource management came naturally to the Hawaiians.

Akaka talks of a gulch on their small plot of land, where tropical fruits grew in abundance—mangoes, papaya, bananas, guava, poha, lilikoi (passion fruit), and tamarind. A stone wall was built around a mango tree. Within this wall the Kawelo family kept their pigs. They also raised chickens.

As young children Akaka and her cousin would awaken at five in the morning to do the planting while it was cool. They grew sweet potatoes and taro. Taro is a green leafy vegetable. Its roots are pounded and mixed with water to make *poi*, a Hawaiian staple. Akaka's family purchased all they needed from "the poi man who came twice a week." It was practically the only food they bought.

She remembers going to the beach once a week to fish. Her grandfather caught mullet, known as *awa awa*, and ulua, which she describes as "so *ono*" (delicious). On other occasions her mother would gather *limu* (seaweed), lobster, crabs, and opelu. The catch was cleaned and salted at the beach and carried home to supply the family for a week.

Most of the furniture in her home was hard carved from native koa trees. Akaka still has two stately rockers made of this fine-grained wood.

From leaves of the lauhala or pandanus tree they wove rugs, tablecloths, place mats, pillows, baskets, purses, hats, sandals, and

fans. Akaka is particularly proud of three lauhala fans which were given to her many years ago by the wife of a former pastor of Kawaiahao Church. She also took pride in showing me her bed, covered with an elegant Hawaiian quilt which her sister had sewn.

When Akaka grew older her family moved to the Island of Oahu, where she attended Kamehameha School in Honolulu. Shortly after graduation she married F. Lang Akane (pronounced A-ka-na). The couple had two daughters. One, Frances Lonohiwa Furtado, lives next to Akaka and checks on her mother daily. Today Akaka has six grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

Her father-in-law, a Chinese herb doctor, was a close friend of King Lunalilo. Akaka's family has had strong ties with royalty. She is fond of relating a story which explains how her mother's family got its name.

At certain times of the year the King would travel around the islands inspecting his kingdom and visiting his people. When Akaka's grandfather was a young boy, he had learned to catch the golden plover, a bird which migrates from Alaska and Siberia to winter in Hawaii. During one of the King's visits to Kohala, the boy was trapping plovers which were nesting in cliffs near his home. It wasn't easy to catch this bird. To do so the youngster hid in the tall grass and imitated the clear melodious whistle of the mother bird. When a young plover approached to answer its mother's call, the boy grabbed it. He cleaned the bird and *koala'd* it (cooked it over the coals).

That was a dish fit for a king! And how the King enjoyed it.

"It was so good, he didn't even need poi," Akaka explained. "You just forget all your table manners when you eat those birds. The King ate and ate. When he was finished they brought my grandfather to him, and they said, 'This is the young lad that caught the birds.'"

The King was so impressed with the boy's skill, he changed the child's name. "From now on," he proclaimed, "I give you the name of *Manu*" (bird). To have a name bestowed upon you by the King is a great honor. Since that day *Manu* has been the family name.

All furnishings in old Hawaii were handcrafted. The woman above plaita a floor mat from pandanus leaves. Below, a pig, filled with hot coals, is readied for roasting in an underground oven. Bundles of food wrapped in ti leaves are cooked with the pig.



Hawaiians have always felt close to their ali'i. Akaka told me that her grandfather's cousin was a *kahili* (standard) bearer for Queen Liliuokalani. Another relative was Lady-in-Waiting to the Queen. "With the other Ladies," Akaka said, "she would sit on the floor at the Queen's feet, fanning her and entertaining her by talking and by singing *meles*" (Hawaiian chants).

It was a sad day for Hawaiians when their beloved Queen Liliuokalani was forced to abdicate January 17, 1893. American control over life in the Islands had become fairly extensive by that time.

ALTHOUGH LIFE in Hawaii had remained constant for over a thousand years, it changed radically after 1778, when the Islands were first "discovered" by the English explorer Captain James Cook. Lawrence H. Fuchs, in his social history, *Hawaii Pono*, written in 1961, says that within a few decades after Cook's discovery, "Capitalism replaced feudalism and oligarchy supplanted monarchy. As the influence of the *haoles* . . . continued to permeate Island life, demoralization and disease reduced the Hawaiian people from a vibrant 300,000 to a little more than 40,000, and many of these were only partly Hawaiian." Recent figures from a Hawaiian newspaper say that, according to estimates of Hawaiians themselves, based on birth and obituary notices, the total number of *Kupunas*—full-blooded Hawaiians—is now about 2,000, the majority being adults beyond child-bearing age.

Ancient Hawaiians had a rigid social structure and a stable economic system, depending on a fairly strict division of labor. A mystical and complex religion was interwoven with the occupational and recreational life, and was an integral part of every activity from canoe building to fishing to preparation of food. Religious *kapus* (taboos) were many and were strictly enforced. Men and women, for example, ate in separate houses. Certain foods were forbidden to women.

In 1819 King Liholiho (Kamehameha II) deliberately broke the *kapus* by sitting down and eating with the women. This was the beginning of the destruction of old religious ways. When the American missionaries arrived from Boston in 1820, the Hawaiians, disillusioned with the old system, questioning, doubting, were ripe for a new religion.

The missionaries came with a purpose and acted with zeal. They were in Hawaii to spread the word—to teach and to convert. In their eagerness to bring their way of life to a people they considered "heathen," they failed to see that the Hawaiian life-style had many values of its own. Had they been a little less intent on

teaching and more willing to learn, the *haoles* could have learned many lessons from the Hawaiians—lessons of ecology, environmental awareness, and an ability to live in harmony with nature.

The Great Mahele of 1848 drastically changed the social system of the Islands. Until this time all land had belonged to

the king. At the time of the Great Mahele, King Kamehameha III divided the land between himself, the chiefs, and the government. For the first time in the history of the Islands, private persons could own land.

The concept of owning land was strange to the Hawaiians. They believed that land



Queen Liliuokalani (1838–1917) was the last independent ruler of the Hawaiian Islands.

Free-lance writer Nancy Alpert Mower is currently editing a set of children's books on early Hawaii.

was sacred. It was the hearth of the gods, the abiding resting place of ancestors. From the land came many things which were used by everyone for sustenance.

Haole businessmen, on the other hand, understood well the concept of land ownership. As years passed and Americans assumed greater control of affairs, the Hawaiians grew less self-sufficient. Today the state is utterly dependent upon the outside world. A West Coast shipping strike produces profound dislocations in business and gravely affects the economy.

By 1893, the year Akaka was born, the Americans had gained extensive control over many areas of economic and political life. They were impatient with Queen Liliuokalani, who insisted on strict adherence to traditional Hawaiian laws, which her people understood. Americans felt these laws didn't allow them the degree of control they desired over lands and business. The American revolutionaries called in the United States Minister and contacted the *USS Boston* on the pretext that American lives were in danger.

On January 16, 1893, American sailors paraded two light cannon through the streets of Honolulu. The following day local revolutionaries seized the government building, demanded the abdication of the Queen, and declared martial law. The United States, through its Minister, immediately recognized the rebel group. The sorrowful and dignified Queen was forced to resign, and the American flag was launched where the Hawaiian pennant had flown.

It happened before Akaka was born, but the memory and sorrow of that day linger on in the minds and hearts of the Hawaiian people. When asked about it, Akaka lowers her head and replies euphemistically, "We didn't like that very much."

There was an unsuccessful attempt at a counterrevolution. The Queen was allowed to live on at her home, Washington Place, which is today the home of Hawaii's governors. Akaka remembers visiting Washington Place as a young girl. "The Queen was always very charming and friendly to us," she says. "We loved her very much."

When the monarchy was overthrown, 2.5 million acres of crown and government

lands were expropriated. A group of Hawaiians calling themselves The ALOHA Association is currently attempting to get these lands back from the federal government.

ALOHA, which stands for "Aboriginal Lands of Hawaiian Ancestry," was formed in 1972, with the specific purpose of getting legislation through Congress providing land reparations, similar to Alaska's Native Claims Bill. A bill in the House of Representatives asks for land reparations for the Hawaiians and \$1 billion in compensation. This bill was heard by the Subcommittee on Indian Affairs, chaired by Congressman Lloyd Meeds.

ALOHA is now awaiting field hearings by Senator Jackson's Interior Committee. The Senate bill asks for a restoration of rights which were based on Hawaiian law and which had been traditionally retained within the Hawaiian archipelago. These include land, water, fishing, mineral, and geothermal rights. The bill also seeks domain rights over the 2.5 million acres of expropriated lands. People now living or working on these lands would be free to remain. ALOHA wants the lease rentals from the land to be paid to the Hawaiian people, rather than to military and business interests. The Association is also asking for \$1 billion to be deposited in the Hawaiian Aboriginal Fund as compensation for the loss of lease income during the years the 2.5 million acres have been occupied.

ALOHA is only one of many organizations attempting to restore a feeling of pride and dignity to the Hawaiian people. Another is the Polynesian Voyaging Society, which will sail a double-hulled canoe from Hawaii to Tahiti and back in the spring of 1976, as part of the state's observance of the Bicentennial celebration. The canoe was built strictly in the Polynesian tradition, using only local materials, without the aid of metal fasteners. The crew will sail without instruments, navigating by stars, winds, and ocean swells.

Polynesians were navigating in this way and sailing thousands of miles over the vast Pacific Ocean hundreds of years before Columbus ventured forth from Europe. These skillful navigators did not drift randomly, as some have suggested, but undertook deliberate voyages of exploration, trade, and colonization. By recreating one of these voyages, the Polynesian Voyaging Society expects to learn a great deal about the ancient Polynesian way of life. The Society places major emphasis on education.

Throughout the state Hawaiians are re-learning many of the skills and arts of their ancestors. City and county governments offer courses in Hawaiian crafts, such as lei making, Hawaiian quilting, and lauhala weaving. Ironically, the Department of Parks and Recreation of the City and

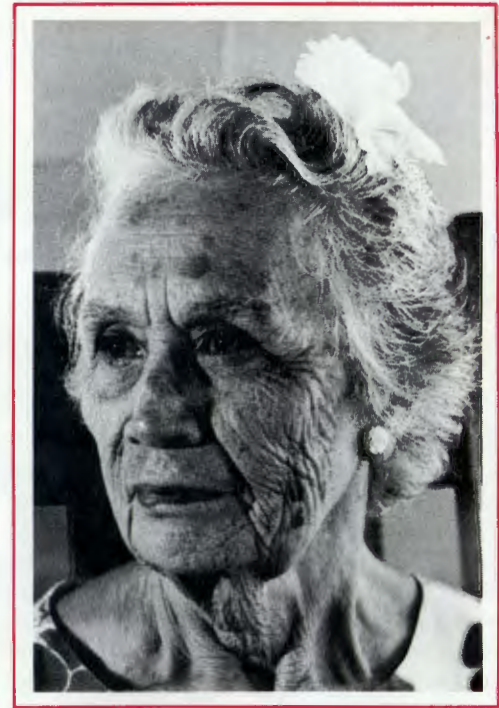


Photo by J.L. Wikoff

At 82, Akaka Akane reflects with fondness on Hawaiian days gone by.

County of Honolulu has recently made small plots available for gardening at certain park sites and is offering instruction in "growing your own food." It's something Akaka Akane and her family would not need to have been taught.

At the same time that the Honolulu city fathers are trying to convince people of the value of living off the land, more and more Hawaiian families, who have been doing just that for generations, are being forced off their land to make room for housing and high-rises to accommodate the state's bulging population.

Many of Akaka's favorite beaches have been turned into hotel-resorts for tourists and are no longer accessible to the public. Traffic congestion on the Island of Oahu grows worse each day.

As we sat in Akaka's living room, overlooking bustling Honolulu Harbor, I asked her how she felt about life in Hawaii today compared with that of her childhood. She thought a moment, then said, "Some things are better today. When I was a child we had to walk to the gulch every day and carry home buckets of fresh water. Today you just turn on the tap and you can get water any temperature you want. Isn't that wonderful?"

Akaka rocked in her koa chair, waved her lauhala fan in front of her gentle face, and reflected, "Still, if I were given a chance to live my life over again, I think I'd like things better the way they were when I was a child."

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Defenders



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Pages tell

DEAR EDITOR:

You are to be commended for your October issue of DEFENDERS. As in the classic work of Charles Dickens, David Copperfield in the opening lines begins—Whether I am to be the hero of my life or that that station be held by another these pages must tell. Certainly your open and positive articles have exposed trapping for what it is; you are the heroes of your lives.

*Rudolph A. Peuh
Lynn Haven, Florida*

Impact

DEAR EDITOR:

Not until I opened the front and back covers of your October issue into one picture did the full impact of its terrible message hit me.

I wish this picture could be reproduced in every newspaper in the country. Unfortunately, it will probably be seen only by subscribers to DEFENDERS, who are already aware of and angered by the butchery of innocent animals so their skins can be stripped from them to adorn the pitiless human animal.

*Ginny Schlageter
Denver, Colorado*

Best ever

DEAR EDITOR:

Your last issue (October, 1975) was by far one of your best ever. Never have the pages of any one magazine shown so clearly all animals' right to live. In your magazine I have found all that is good: man's desire to help creatures who cannot help themselves and to speak for those who cannot speak. No aspiration could be nobler or closer to God.

*Joyce Brumitt
Kankakee, Illinois*

Best yet

DEAR EDITOR:

I must congratulate you on the October issue of DEFENDERS, which just arrived. I've read enough of it to see that it is the best issue yet. Special thanks for James A. Cox's "If You Want to Be Good—Join the Big Brotherhood." Maybe he can do one of his epic poems about beavers.

Tomorrow morning New Jersey small-game season begins. From then on, my husband and I will spend much of our time patrolling the [Unexpected Wildlife] refuge, and we will be witness to many atrocities in the name of "sport." It seems to me your magazine is taking a stronger stand than ever regarding hunting, and I'm glad to see it.

*Mrs. Hope Sawyer Buyukmihci
Newfield, New Jersey*

NOTICE

The American Carnivore Series of collectors' prints by Paul Breeden, announced in the October, 1975, issue, has been cancelled. If you have already placed orders, refunds will be made.