

## Beneath the Touristic Sheen of Waikīkī

For tourists, Waikīkī is an iconic place of sun, sand, and hotels. They are welcomed into a “Hawaiian paradise” by the manicured gardens and paved streets leading to the hotels, boutiques, and restaurants of Kalākaua Avenue, the main thoroughfare between two natural markers. Lē‘ahi (Diamond Head) stands grandly at the eastern part of the southern coastline, and Kālia (Fort DeRussy) is a western coastal corner that bends into Ala Moana.

But beneath the façade of paradise are histories of upheaval, war, and displacement. Two Hawai‘i-based demilitarization organizers, Kanaka ‘Ōiwi woman Aunty Terri Keko‘olani and Ilocana plantation labor descendant Ellen-Rae Cachola, designed a DeTour from Lē‘ahi to Kālia to point out how military and tourist infrastructures keep Indigenous and immigrant peoples enmeshed in the transnational structures of empire, hidden in plain sight. The history of modern Hawai‘i has been about the theft and occupation of lands of the Hawaiian Kingdom in order to make way for plantations, hotels, and military bases. Wealthy businessmen orchestrated Kānaka ‘Ōiwi displacement from their traditional lands and livelihoods and organized immigrant labor to work for their corporate enterprises. According to the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, a large portion of the workers in the visitor industry are from the Philippines, China, and Micronesia. Yet since the turn of the twentieth century, Kanaka ‘Ōiwi and immigrant laborers have raised their consciousness regarding the restoration of Hawaiian self-determination and the return of their lands for peaceful societal needs. This vision is complicated by the majority of Hawai‘i’s population being dependent on these industries for their livelihoods.

Keko'olani and Cachola's DeTour through the military-tourism infrastructures of Waikīkī recalls the violence of imperialism in this place and how its occupation was part of the violence wrought on places across the sea. The DeTour's weaving of stories about Waikīkī also aims to educate people about its heritage of resistance.

### **DeTour through Dispossession**

Kānaka 'Ōiwi harnessed the spouting fresh waters of Waikīkī by weaving the stream flows from Makīkī, Mānoa, and Pālolo at Kālia, the western shoreline of Waikīkī, into an alchemy of living abundance. There, loko i'a (fishponds) and lo'i kalo (wetland taro patches) were cultivated as sources of food and livelihood for the Hawaiian Kingdom. But the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy in 1893 by Euro-American businessmen, backed by the U.S. Marines, ushered in a transformation of land by war economies. In 1898, Camp McKinley was set up at the foot of Lē'ahi, in what is now Kapi'olani Park, as a temporary barracks for U.S. soldiers who arrived from San Francisco on their way to the Philippine war zones during the Spanish-American War.<sup>1</sup> The iconic volcanic cone of Lē'ahi (Diamond Head)—once used by Kānaka 'Ōiwi as a vista point to light fires in order to communicate to canoes out at sea—was turned into a military installation. During World War I, the U.S. military appropriated the high coastal position of Lē'ahi to carve a multilevel lookout and artillery installation camouflaged in the walls of the dormant volcano. The neighboring peak of Tantalus served as a surveillance point, collecting data on the locations of ships and planes from afar. The coordinates would be sent to those stationed at Fort DeRussy's massive automatic rifles situated in batteries Randolph and Dudley, on the west side of Waikīkī, to an 'ili (land division) known as Kālia.

In the 1920s, the streams flowing mauka (mountainward) to makai (seaward) were severed by the construction of the Ala Wai Canal. The stoppage of water dredged and dried up the loko i'a and lo'i kalo, which were then used as real estate for the hotels, roads, and other infrastructure we see today. Sewage, debris, and urban runoff darken the waters of the Ala Wai Canal. The Ala Wai demarcates Waikīkī as a territory where tourist desire is paramount, Indigenous lifeways are erased by a patchwork of hotels, and where workers shuttle in from elsewhere on the island to serve a new kind of plantation economy.

Fort DeRussy's Randolph and Dudley batteries have been out of commission since World War I. But these installations have been transformed to house the U.S. Army Museum, which glorifies the military use of Waikīkī, and



Lē'ahi (Diamond Head). In the distance, the U.S. military installation carved into the walls of Lē'ahi is camouflaged from ground view, rendering the image of the dormant volcanic cone a classic symbol of touristic Waikīkī. *Photograph by Jesse Stephen.*

the whole island of O'ahu, as part of the touristic narrative of Americanized Hawai'i. Next door is the Hale Koa Hotel, built on property owned by the U.S. federal government. This hotel is a site of rest and recreation for U.S. military personnel who enforce U.S. jurisdiction over the state of Hawai'i. Over 20 percent of the military installations in Hawai'i are currently concentrated on O'ahu Island, such as at Pearl Harbor, Schofield Barracks, Kāne'ōhe Marine Corps Base, and Mākua Valley. The U.S. military occupation of various sacred sites throughout O'ahu inaugurated the islands' new role as launching pads for U.S. occupation throughout the Pacific and Asia.

War and nuclear testing caused displacement and devastation, propelling people from their homelands to Hawai'i in search of livelihoods in the tourist economy that accompanies and romanticizes the militarized presence in the islands. The transformation of the Pacific from a Spanish lake to an American lake was about the U.S. increasing the number of military bases in the region in order to tap markets. After the Spanish-American War, the U.S. sought to control the Philippines, instigating the Philippine-American War. Since then, the Philippine economy and political system have been configured to meet national and international corporate interests—not those of a self-sufficient domestic economy. This led to the mass emigration of its own people to work abroad. Filipinos are the largest workforce in the Waikīkī hotels; they send earned monies back to their families in their homelands.

The rise of China is one reason for the Obama administration's "Pivot to Asia," or the increase in military construction and investment in Asia and the Pacific. Immigrant Chinese are a rising labor demographic in Waikīkī hotels today. China's economic growth is causing much rural-urban inequality, pulling many rural Chinese to migrate to urbanized areas in China and abroad as maids, janitors, and migrant teachers.<sup>2</sup> The U.S. has developed a "strong" image as a global power through its nuclear weapons research and development. U.S. nuclear weapons testing occurred in Micronesian islands such as Bikini, Rongelap, and Ebeye in the 1950s. Since then, Micronesians have been migrating to Hawai'i because of the bombing and radioactive devastation of their lands.<sup>3</sup> In Hawai'i, they struggle to find housing and health care, and they work in service, sales, production, and laborer positions.<sup>4</sup>

### **Aloha 'Āina in the Labor Struggle?**

U.S. imperialism has transformed lands into military bases protecting the capitalist economy as if it were the only way to be. But the people have not been conquered. The history of interracial labor movements between immigrant and Indigenous peoples demonstrate how collective action can dramatically transform the culture and political economy of Hawai'i. Aloha 'āina (love of land, patriotism) is a Kanaka 'Ōiwi value of feeling ancestral connections to their lands, even so far as to go against the prevailing order to protect their homeland from further destruction and corporatization. For many immigrants working in the hotels, this feeling of connection to land is obscured by a material need to survive the dominant settler economy, as relations to ancestral lands had been severed by war, economic displacement, and migration. The attention to militarism and tourism in Waikīkī during the Waikīkī DeTour reveals how the interlocking settler economies of agricultural plantations, tourism, and militarism can bridge labor organizing in Waikīkī to Kanaka 'Ōiwi-led movements seeking freedom from imperial control.

Since 1893, the Indigenous people of Hawai'i have been opposing the theft of their lands by corporate capitalists who consolidated into the "Big Five" (Alexander and Baldwin, American Factors, Castle and Cooke, Theo H. Davis, and C. Brewer and Co.), and were all owned by haole (Euro-American) elites who acquired a great deal of land and monetary wealth on the islands before and after the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy. A characteristic of this Euro-American settlement was the establishment of military bases as collateral for the U.S. military, which assisted the businessmen during the overthrow. Thus, Diamond Head and Fort DeRussy were developed and used for southern coast defense purposes in 1911, before World War I broke out.

Around this time, agricultural plantations were strengthening throughout the islands, diverting water from the traditional ahupua'a at the windward sides of the islands to arid areas for cultivating sugarcane and pineapple cash crops.<sup>5</sup> More workers were imported and segregated into Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Puerto Rican, and Portuguese plantation camps all over the islands. Newer immigrants who came to Hawai'i were eager to earn wages, as they had been disenfranchised in their own homelands. Established workers noticed the racial and income inequalities in the plantations and organized strikes against the exploitative conditions of the plantations. Filipinos received the lowest pay, whereas earlier waves of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Portuguese migrants received incrementally higher wages, respectively, based on race.<sup>6</sup> Blood unionism was the initial strategy for plantation workers to organize those with shared ethnicity, dialect, or "blood" because they were in close proximity to each other in the same camps and spoke the same languages. But workers of other ethnic groups would break picket lines, or even sabotage union-building efforts; thus workers began to learn the importance of interethnic organizing to resist the ways that working people were often divided and pitted against each other. Some of the first Japanese-Filipino strikes occurred in plantation camps in Waipahu and Ewa, O'ahu.<sup>7</sup>

A major leader of interracial union organizing was Harry Kamoku, a Kanaka 'Ōiwi-Chinese labor organizer with the Hilo chapter of the International Longshore and Worker's Union (ILWU). Kamoku recruited people from all over the islands using a message of unity: regardless of the color of their skin, everyone had the same red blood in their veins. This unity was the major force behind the Indigenous and immigrant workers resisting corporate exploitation through the Great Sugar Strike of 1946, which brought the Big Five to their knees.

But when the agricultural corporations saw they could cut costs through automation and by shifting operations to other countries, the agricultural industry began to lay off workers. In its place, the tourism economy emerged as another opportunity for workers to gain wages. To protect themselves from this new kind of industrial exploitation, workers of the Royal Hawaiian and Moana hotels, the first hotels in Waikīkī, won contracts during the 1940s. But during World War II, from 1941 to 1945, the hotels were closed because Waikīkī became a site of rest and recreation for the U.S. military. The Moana and Royal Hawaiian hotels were encircled with barbed wire, meant to protect O'ahu's southern coast from a potential Japanese attack on the shoreline. Hawaiian girls would dance hula for the USO mess halls in Waikīkī.

Navy sailors would stand in long lines outside of brothels along Hotel Street, Chinatown, to buy sex from Indigenous and immigrant women caught in the prostitution industry.<sup>8</sup>

The Cold War of the 1950s brought the Red Scare, and many of Hawai'i's labor organizers were profiled, blacklisted, detained, or killed as "communist threats" against the U.S. During the 1960s to the 1990s, Hawai'i's economy accelerated its shift from agricultural plantations to tourism.<sup>9</sup> It was a dangerous time to organize, as fear of being labeled "un-American" was high. Harriet Bouslog was the attorney of the ILWU, and Helen Kanahale was a Kanaka 'Ōiwi woman organizer who joined the Women's Auxiliary of the ILWU and was secretary treasurer of the United Public Workers union. They organized women in the professional ranks of the Hawaii State Teachers Association, Hawaii Nurses Association, Hawaii Government Employees Association, and Local 5, creating racially diverse unions across the state and empowering workers to navigate and assert their rights in the service economy.<sup>10</sup> The strength of their organizing to unite a broad base was founded on traditional Hawaiian values of mutual responsibility to one another and a sense of 'ohana, or family. There were tensions, however. Kanahale resented Bouslog's co-optation of the Native Hawaiian lei and terms such as aloha and 'ohana, and labor organizers were selective in their historical and cultural understanding of Indigenous Hawai'i. The majority of the labor movement supported U.S. statehood in 1959, bypassing the desires of Indigenous Hawaiians who wanted their national sovereignty restored.<sup>11</sup> In the end, the plebiscite for statehood was voted on by a majority of the non-Indigenous residents of Hawai'i. As a result, U.S. occupation of Hawai'i continues to this day.

The story to unite the labor movement with struggles of the broader community is waiting to be told, though there have been moments of solidarity. In the 1970s, during the Vietnam War, the Hale Koa Hotel opened for U.S. military personnel in Kālia, next door to batteries Randolph and Dudley, so that their families could stay on vacation in Hawai'i and visit the U.S. Army Museum. Between 2004 and 2005, complaints of sexual harassment arose between a military veteran-turned-parking manager John "Jack" Lloyd and one of his female staff, Ernestine Gonda. Gonda reported unwelcomed touching and sexually explicit gifts from Lloyd, her boss. When she tried to report to the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Office at U.S. Army Fort Shafter, following human resources policy, she was ignored. Lloyd served as the EEO counselor for the Hale Koa Hotel, which made Gonda suspect that her reports were being intercepted. She then approached the Army Morale, Welfare

and Recreation Command, but no one responded to her complaints. Gonda was facing a long history of normalized sexism in military ranks, whereby sexual violence committed by officials against lower-ranked personnel occurs without investigation in order to silence victims and avoid upsetting the military hierarchy. Lloyd's harassment continued, driving Gonda to leave the hotel altogether. This case brought forward more women of Vietnamese and Filipina descent to share that they too had experienced sexual harassment by Lloyd. The labor union representing the Hale Koa workers created a movement to file a class-action complaint against Jack Lloyd for alleged sex and race discrimination.<sup>12</sup> The settlement resulted in Hale Koa removing Lloyd from the hotel, agreeing to hold sexual harassment workshops, and making other human resource changes at the management level.<sup>13</sup> This historical moment set a precedent through which immigrant hotel workers began to challenge and change the sexualized, militarized structure of Waikīkī. This herstory shows how the global network of military bases that militarizes Hawai'i and local people's homelands is the cause for racist and sexist violence against those peoples. It also reveals that if immigrant workers from the Pacific and Asia bring an understanding of militarism to their opposition against exploitative working conditions, points of solidarity with Kānaka 'Ōiwi can be found in resistance against U.S. occupation that displaces them in their own homeland.

### **What Will Be the Story That Unifies?**

Unions and antiwar organizations across the United States have organized coalitions toward a common vision to demilitarize U.S. foreign policy and to support workers' rights.<sup>14</sup> One technique for use in working toward this vision is to engage in dialogue with different movements and sectors of society. The Aikea Movement, spearheaded by the Local 5 union, has facilitated dialogues between labor organizers and Indigenous-led movement organizers to communicate, share information, and build skills and relationships in order to work together for a common cause.

This DeTour was created by Kanaka 'Ōiwi woman Auntie Terri and an Ilocano woman, Ellen-Rae, to engage in dialogue with Local 5 organizers and the children of hotel workers in order to find a common context and explore how we can work together as a unified movement. These dialogues have invoked memories of the labor movement throughout Hawai'i in order to assess the layers of settler economies that occupy this place and attempt to divide people. But also in these stories are the struggles and will of island peoples to weave their stories together in an effort to strengthen





Gun emplacement on Diamond Head. This retired, northeast-facing gun emplacement at Battery 407 on Diamond Head is one node within a network of military installations that integrate Lēʻahi into the militarized infrastructures of Waikīkī. *Photograph by Ellen-Rae Cachola.*

homegrown social movements driven by a collective belief in the sacredness of these lands and of our collective labor, beyond corporate and military ownership. But most importantly, this lens of history reminds us that if we do not like how we are being used by corporate owners, how can we be the ones to see and treat each other as allies in order to create a different economy and future for this place? The responsibility is not just local but requires those who come from afar to see that their arrival can either add to the oppression or help dismantle it. To the tourists from afar, or who arrive here: you too are included in this work, as it is your money and physical presence that are inevitable factors in this dynamic. Whoever you are—will you contribute to this settler colonialism, or are you willing to help use your position to dismantle this oppression?

#### Notes

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- 3 Joseph H. Genz, Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, Monica C. La Briola, Alexander Mawyer, Elicita N. Morei, John P. Rosa, "Indigenous Responses, Resistance and Revitalization," in *Militarism and Nuclear Testing in the Pacific*, Teaching Oceania Series, vol. 1, ed. Monica C. LaBriola (Honolulu: Center for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawai'i-Mānoa, 2018), <http://hdl.handle.net/10125/42430/>.
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- 11 Diskin Monahan, "Introduction," 19.
- 12 Kari Lydersen, "Harassment Unchecked at Army Hotel," *In These Times*, October 15, 2007 (accessed August 15, 2014), [http://inthesetimes.com/article/3370/harassment\\_unchecked\\_at\\_army\\_hotel/](http://inthesetimes.com/article/3370/harassment_unchecked_at_army_hotel/).
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## Resources

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