Sovereignty and the Sovereign

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I'D LIKE to present a brief overview of the period in which Hawaii made its extraordinarily rapid transition to constitutional monarchy. It will consider the subject of sovereignty, and touch on the related idea of commonwealth, the ancient meaning of which is wellbeing of the people. An underlying theme is how aspects of Hawaiian polity are similar to British (and therefore Australian) polity.

There were differences of course. Within a few decades Hawaii assimilated influences it took Britain several centuries to assimilate. Also, for many reasons, Hawaiian constitutional monarchy never had the opportunity to evolve into the Westminster model as we currently know it, since that model is Victorian. From the beginning, the Hawaiian model was more Georgian and therefore ironically more American. It wasn't like the Victorian model where the sovereign became an observer with reserved powers. It never had the opportunity to strike the right balance between Bagehot's "dignified" government (the crown) and "efficient" government (the cabinet).

Like American presidents, Hawaiian sovereigns were expected to be efficient as well as dignified. They were politically involved and politically vulnerable. They never had the luxury of separating foreign interests from indigenous interests even when the former were compromising the latter. Their dilemma was how to incorporate the reality of local foreigners who, while never representing the views of foreign governments, hid behind their nationality while making trouble for the Hawaiian sovereign and people.

Sovereignty before Contact

PRE-CONTACT Hawaii was a commonwealth (lāhui), with an unwritten tradition of common law, which mediated a social contract between rulers and ruled, through an intricate system of taboo (kapu). The high chiefs (ali'i nui) were sacred and governed with divine power (mana). Lesser chiefs (kaukau ali'i) of subservient rank included the stewards of the land (konohiki) who acted as intermediaries between the high chiefs and the people. The priests and teachers and scientists (kāhuna) led religious observances, interpreted the natural world through polytheism, and advised the chiefs. The commoners (maka'āinana or "people of the land") were farmers, fishermen,

craftsmen, and their families, who could improve their social status and acquire mana over time. Below them were servants or slaves (kauwā) who couldn't improve their social status or acquire mana. They may have been the descendents of prisoners of war, or conquered earlier inhabitants, or both.

This commonwealth was feudal in the same way Europe was around the tenth century, although the analogy with feudalism is contested among the current generation of Hawaiian historians. Each island was ruled by a paramount chief (mōʻī). Each island was divided into districts (moku). Each district contained long narrow pie-shaped sub-divisions (ahupuaʻa), extending from the mountain to the sea, which allowed rulers and ruled to share the products of the highland regions and cultivated lowlands and ocean.

The Hawaiian relationship with the land (āina) was inalienable: that is, land couldn't be bought or sold in a manner that alienated those who depended on it for their livelihood. It's important that this relationship isn't romanticised. The reciprocal obligation between rulers and ruled wasn't romantic. We shouldn't assume the aliʻi automatically cared for the makaʻāinana under their jurisdiction; neither should we assume the makaʻāinana were victims unable to negotiate their traditional rights of tenure. The makaʻāinana weren't passive or unknowing or easily deceived.

One analogy to describe this relationship, and the way it changed with contact, is the contentious enclosure of common land in Britain between the twelfth and nineteenth centuries. When thinking about sovereignty and commonwealth it's useful to keep this analogy in mind as it's one of the similarities between pre-modern Hawaii and pre-modern Britain. In Britain land enclosure represented a shift from the feudal idea of commonwealth as common wellbeing towards the capitalist idea of general good as gross national product. History provides several examples of British commoners fighting enclosure and negotiating their common law rights of tenure. For centuries land enclosure was denounced by state and church because it was seen as detrimental to the people's wellbeing, but by the nineteenth century state and church began to support it. The same shift happened in Hawaii telescoped into one lifespan.

The reign of Kamehameha

SOON AFTER contact, Hawaii became a focus of foreign trade and supply. The high chiefs sought counsel from foreign advisers on how to negotiate with the outside world. They also sought foreign weaponry, to give them an advantage of in their wars against each other.

During his last voyage in 1779, Cook met a young man, Kamehameha, a lesser chief who hadn't yet fought his way to the rank of high chief. In 1790

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Kamehameha obtained the services of two British advisers and began to accumulate foreign weaponry. In 1795, with the aid of these advisers and weaponry, he united most of the islands into one kingdom. In 1810 the last two islands were incorporated peacefully into that new kingdom.

With canny astuteness, Kamehameha transformed Hawaii, and it’s been difficult to deconstruct Hawaiian history apart from him, or apart from the advantage that contact gave him. Indeed, without that advantage Hawaii may never have become a single kingdom. Many new things happened during Kamehameha’s reign. He established a unified government (aupuni). He centralised power around himself and his allies. He also saw something of himself and his new nation in the British that he didn’t see in other foreigners. Under Kamehameha, Hawaii became, for the first time, not only a racial commonwealth, with a paramount chief for each island, but a nation with one paramount chief. Kamehameha was the first Hawaiian sovereign (mōʻī) in the feudal British sense.

Vancouver, an officer with Cook, who later captained his own voyages to Hawaii in the 1790s, warned Kamehameha against trusting the motives of foreigners. But through experience, Kamehameha came to believe he could trust the British more than other foreigners and “ceded” Hawaii to Britain. This “cession” was never formally recognised or acted on by the British; neither was it fully understood by the Hawaiians; and it’s not to be confused with a later temporary cession during the 1840s.

Kamehameha recognised that contact had changed Hawaii forever and allowed sovereignty to evolve from something purely indigenous to something that incorporated the foreigner in a limited way. This new sovereignty was his sacred responsibility; a balancing act that depended on his public authority and personal judgement. Also, while he respected the British God, whom he’d heard much about, he remained loyal to his gods until his death. In spite of this, there was an inevitable erosion of Hawaiian religion during his reign. The Kamehameha dynasty lasted until 1872. Two of his sons and two of his grandsons became sovereigns. Each of these generations represents a fundamental shift in Hawaiian sovereignty.

The reigns of Liholiho and Kauikeaouli

LIHOLIHO ascended in 1819 as the eldest son of Kamehameha’s most royal wife, Keopuolani. In the Hawaiian caste system, Keopuolani was of higher rank than Kamehameha himself. Therefore she brought more mana to her husband’s new dynasty than he commanded by his birth.

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Liholiho never ruled in his own right. During his enthronement, his father's favourite wife, Ka'ahumanu, told the new sovereign and assembled chiefs it was Kamehameha's will she be kuhina nui, an office created by Kamehameha, traditionally translated as co-regent but now thought of as a kind of prime minister. Her action was never contested, which is interpreted as a sign of its legitimacy, and through this office of co-regent (or prime minister) she exercised much authority during Liholiho's reign.

Supported by Liholiho's mother, Keopuolani, Ka'ahumanu lobbied the new sovereign to break the most sacred taboo ('aikapu), which determined the separateness of men and women in eating, worshipping, working and child rearing. Ka'ahumanu's motives were political; a means through which she cemented her pre-eminent role in the new reign. She achieved that pre-eminence but from the moment she sat down to eat profanely ('ainoa) with Liholiho the old religion was effectively abolished. Idols were burnt, places of worship (heiau) were destroyed, chiefs ceased being divine, priests lost their authority. The mortar that cemented traditional Hawaiian civilisation was removed.

Within weeks of the dismantling of the old religion, Calvinist missionaries arrived from New England with their brand of puritanical Christianity. They weren't automatically allowed to settle in the kingdom and after several days of negotiation Liholiho let them remain for one year on trial. History tends to assume Hawaii had no knowledge of Christianity before their arrival but this isn't so. Anglicanism had been a strong but informal presence since contact, and acceptance of the American missionaries was made easier once the rulers were assured they believed in the same God as the British and their presence wouldn't offend the United Kingdom.

Liholiho was ambivalent about these new missionaries. Also, the growing presence of foreigners in general was presenting complex and challenging intercultural problems that needed to be addressed. For example, countries such as Russia were trying to establish a sphere of influence in the region, and the commercial interests of local foreigners had no protection under Hawaiian common law.

Liholiho continued to regard Hawaii as being under British protection and towards the end of 1823 he and his wife Kamāmalu sailed to England. The purpose of the journey was to further the British alliance, learn more about British polity, and share Hawaii's apprehension about the intentions of the Russian government and the large influx of Americans. But soon after their arrival in London, before they could be received by George IV, the royal couple contracted measles and died.

Liholiho's brother Kauikeaouli ascended in 1824 but Ka'ahumanu was regent until her death in 1832. During most of his thirty-year reign Kauikeaouli struggled to protect sovereignty and commonwealth. On one hand were the missionaries and foreigners, with their benevolence and superiority, whose interests had no formal protection under Hawaiian common law, and who believed the indigenous people were serfs in feudal bondage to their rulers. On the other hand were the indigenous people, who understood their common law, didn't see themselves as serfs in bondage, and feared (quite rightly) that their rulers were allowing the foreigner to replace them as the people of the land. At the heart of the struggle were two competing and antithetical ideas, the traditional Hawaiian idea of reciprocal obligation between rulers and ruled within a system of inalienable land tenure, and the modern American idea of transforming commoners into a sturdy yeoman class within a system of alienable land title.

Under Kauikeaouli, common law gradually gave way to statutory law. The groundwork was laid in the late 1830s as the missionaries taught the rulers about constitutional governance and capitalist economy with an American bias. The first codification of organic law came with the Declaration of Rights of 1839, which paved the way for both constitutional monarchy and private ownership of land.

Not surprisingly, the Declarations of Rights is expressed in language that echoes the American Declaration of Independence. In the Hawaiian document, God gives certain rights to "all men and all chiefs" and "all people of all lands". In the American document, God gives certain rights to "all men" who are "created equal". The Constitutions of 1840 and 1852 furthered the Declaration of Rights by recognising three divisions within the constitutional monarchy: the sovereign as chief executive, the legislature, and the judiciary. As chief executive, the sovereign could appoint anyone to the executive, even if they hadn't been elected to the legislature, in a manner similar to the American president. The legislature was composed of three estates—the sovereign, house of nobles, and house of representatives—each with the right of veto.

In theory, Kauikeaouli suddenly became a man subject to the rule of a new democracy with a polity that was still being worked out in a Hawaiian context. In practice, Kauikeaouli was still a sovereign, expected to rule as well as reign while simultaneously managing the transition to democracy as best he could. Western historians have tended to portray him in a negative light but it's doubtful whether any British sovereign—or any American president—could have managed that transition better than he did. Kauikeaouli managed extraordinary pressures, within and without. Each warrants a separate discussion but only three can be mentioned in passing here.

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First, inevitable tensions emerged when, within a few years, foreigners were allowed to participate in all levels of government: executive, legislature (including, ironically, the house of nobles), judiciary, and civil service. The rationale was the belief that Hawaiians could only be apprentices in the new system of governance and couldn't manage it themselves until they obtained their tickets. The vehicle was a definition of Hawaiian subject, similar to the definition of British subject, which didn't discriminate racially. There was also a royal prerogative to grant denization, or dual citizenship. Foreigners could become Hawaiian subjects by taking an oath of loyalty to the sovereign as the personification of sovereignty. Relatively few British became Hawaiian subjects because they took their oath of loyalty to their own sovereign seriously. More Americans became Hawaiian subjects, as a means to an end, like a passport or working visa. Some became dual nationals with divided loyalties. Others relinquished their Hawaiian citizenship when it no longer suited them to keep it.

Second, Kauikeaouli had to accommodate the fact that foreign individuals wanted guarantees of protection for their interests in Hawaii, and those interests weren't always compatible with the interests of the indigenous people. He also knew foreign powers were annexing indigenous kingdoms all over the Pacific, and local foreigners were always threatening to play the cards of annexation or revolution if they didn't get their way. In order to protect Hawaiian sovereignty, Kauikeaouli sent delegations to the United States and Europe to settle disputes, negotiate treaties that made concessions to international law, and secure recognition of Hawaii as a sovereign and independent nation. By the mid-1840s Hawaii was welcomed into the family of nations. From then on it maintained diplomatic and treaty relationships with the major powers.

Third, the māhele, a top-down land reform, introduced the concept of alienable private property that could be purchased and owned and sold. After the māhele, traditional reciprocal obligations between rulers and ruled became harder to identify and more difficult to negotiate; also, foreigners were allowed to buy land and soon became major competitors with the indigenous people. Within a few years the commonwealth of a traditional feudal economy based on land tenure was replaced by the gross national product of a modern capitalist economy based on land title. The consequences were unintended and unexpected, and there are lively narratives and counter-narratives about the effects of the māhele that need to be understood.

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The reigns of Alexander and Lot

FOLLOWING Kauikeaouli's death in 1854, Kamehameha's grandson, Alexander, ascended the throne. Alexander was a renaissance man who, although educated by missionaries and friendly with foreigners, remained suspicious of their influence and intentions. A devout Christian, as well as an anglophile, he brought the Anglican Church to Hawaii and translated the 1662 *Book of Common Payer* into Hawaiian. His part-British wife, Emma, was a favourite of Queen Victoria, who agreed to be godmother of their son, Prince Albert. In 1983, in the presence of Robert Runcie, then Archbishop of Canterbury, the Episcopal Diocese of Hawaii added Alexander and Emma to its liturgical calendar. They're remembered on 28 November, a day known locally as the Feast of the Holy Sovereigns.

By the time Alexander acceded in 1855, Hawaii had been internationally recognised as a sovereign nation for a decade. Its economy was making the transition from whaling to sugar. Religious tolerance had been formally adopted and Calvinist prejudices were no longer as dominant as they once were. There were other tensions, though, which Alexander highlighted in his inaugural speech to the legislature:

> To be kind and generous to the foreigner, to trust and confide in him, is no new thing in the history of our race … I cannot fail to heed the example of my ancestors. I therefore say to the foreigner … he is welcome … as long as he comes with laudable motives … But if he comes here with no more exalted motive than that of building up his own interests, at the expense of the native—to seek our confidence only to betray it—with no higher ambition than that of overthrowing our government, and introducing anarchy, confusion and bloodshed—then he is most unwelcome.

Apart from local foreigners, the new constitutional system also stood in the way of effective government, as Alexander understood it.

Under the Constitution of 1852, universal suffrage had been given to all male subjects, indigenous and naturalised, to elect representatives to the lower house, and there was no property requirement to be eligible to vote. All appropriation bills originated in the lower house, which was undisciplined, perhaps because there was no party system, no Westminster-style relationship between legislature and cabinet, no dialectic between loyal government and loyal opposition. Amending the constitution was difficult. The majority of both houses had to agree to a proposed amendment being put. If successful, the proposed amendment had to be published three months before the election of the next legislature, which was then required to pass it by a

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two-thirds majority of both houses. Also, both the kuhina nui and privy council had rights of veto over the sovereign and cabinet.

If much of this sounds similar to the Westminster system of check and balances, it was a nightmare for a sovereign expected to both rule and reign over a society, only just emerging from feudalism, whose citizens were still coming to terms with how democracy worked. There's even a salutary piece of shared history with late twentieth-century Australia**. W**ithin six months of his accession, Alexander had to dissolve a legislature attempting to pass an appropriation bill that was beyond the government's revenues.

If democracy and capitalism seemed to be the way forward, the sovereign was never sure whose interests they best served. It was becoming obvious to the sovereign that the commonwealth, and the old common law, which once mediated the shared social contract between rulers and ruled, was not really being translated into the new statutory law. There were constitutional amendments adopted in 1856, but these didn't change those features of the constitution Alexander found most unworkable. In a special message to the legislature in 1859, he said:

> Experience has conclusively shown that the Constitution of 1852 does not, in many important respects, meet the expectations of its framers, or of my Predecessor, by whom it was voluntarily conceded … The 105th Article of the Constitution prescribes the ordinary mode of amendment. Without reference to a different manner of revision, clearly founded on the inherent rights of the different Estates of the Kingdom, I am, at this time, content to appeal to the Legislature for such action as will provide an adequate remedy for all existing difficulties.

Here the sovereign was placing the legislature on notice. If it couldn't find ways of fixing the constitution, the sovereign would take matters into his own hands. But Alexander died of asthma at the age of twenty-nine and the constitutional problem was handed on to his brother, Lot, another grandson of Kamehameha.

Lot dealt with the problem by calling a constitutional convention soon after his accession in 1864. But when delegates couldn't agree on what form suffrage should take he dissolved the convention with the following speech:

> I am very sorry that we do not agree on this important point … in all other monarchical countries suffrage is limited, and it is thought that ... the class who possess property are the proper persons to advise their Representatives in regard to the necessities of the Government … As we do not agree it is useless to prolong the session … I make

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> known today that the Constitution of 1852 is abrogated. I will give you a Constitution.

Some historians suggest Lot's action was unconstitutional, but some political scientists note that he acted within his powers under the Constitution of 1852.

After consultation, Lot drafted and promulgated the Constitution of 1864, through which the office of kuhina nui was abolished, the sovereign was required to take an oath of office on accession, the position of the sovereign and cabinet were strengthened, both houses sat in one chamber—in an attempt to bring discipline to the lower house—a property qualification was introduced for both voters and representatives, and an educational qualification was introduced for voters born after 1840. One important feature, through which Lot intended to stabilise the Hawaiian constitution, and the role of the crown within it, was the removal of the sovereign's right to alter or abrogate the new constitution without the approval of the legislature.

So Lot *removed* the sovereign's right to do to the new constitution what he himself did to the Constitution of 1852. This was a noble gesture. It represents a great deal of faith in the evolution of Hawaiian polity. What Lot was doing, too, was approximating the traditional role of the crown, in the old commonwealth, as the promulgator of common law on the advice of the council of chiefs and privy council. But the sovereign was still expected to rule as well as reign, the crown was still vulnerable, there was still no party system with party discipline, the fortunes of the indigenous population did not improve, and the social and economic ascendancy of local foreigners was not arrested. Ironically, too, by making both suffrage and political power issues of class rather than race—issues of land title rather than land tenure—the new constitution disenfranchised the indigenous population even further. Also, local Americans were hostile to anything that increased the authority of a monarch, especially an indigenous one. Americans were unable, and would always be unable, to see a connection between sovereignty and the sovereign: to understand the idea of the crown as the people.

The reigns of Lunalilo and Kalākaua

THE KAMEHAMEHA dynasty ended with Lot's death in 1872. As Lot was a bachelor, who hadn't named a successor, according to the Constitution of 1864 it was up to the legislature to elect a new sovereign. William Lunalilo and David Kalākaua were the two candidates and the legislature elected Lunalilo by an overwhelming majority; however, his health was frail and he died of tuberculosis thirteen months into his reign. In 1874 another election was held and Kalākaua won a convincing majority over the only other candidate, Dowager Queen Emma, Alexander's widow.

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In terms of sovereignty, Alexander and Lot were gifted sovereigns who understood the political and social and economic contexts in which they reigned and ruled. Kalākaua had a different vision altogether. Known as the Merry Monarch, Kalākaua encouraged the rebirth of a Hawaiian culture long suppressed by the missionaries, promoted the birthrate among his people, staged his own coronation, built himself a palace, and travelled the world raising Hawaii's international profile. Much of this was good, as far as dignified government and identification with indigenous sensibilities went, but to some local foreigners it wasn't efficient government.

The Hawaiian economy now depended on the production of sugar, on finding a stable market for that sugar, and on a finding a workforce that couldn't be filled locally. In this context, good government meant serving the interests of foreign plantation owners. Kalākaua was useful to them in negotiating treaties with the United States, which benefited the sale of sugar, and in negotiating treaties with the monarchs of China and Portugal and Japan, which facilitated emigrations of contract labour to Hawaii. But during bad periods, when things didn't go their way, when the markets weren't favourable, when unregulated capitalism did what it did from time to time, Kalākaua took the blame. It was easy to blame him, since he was no Alexander or Lot, his administration wasn't as transparent as it might have been, and some of the ways in which he exercised his political influence seemed corrupt by foreign standards.

In 1887 a group of local foreigners plotted. A new constitution was written in secret, the legislative assembly was never consulted over it, and Kalākaua was forced to signed it, which is why it's traditionally referred to at the Bayonet Constitution. Under its provisions, executive power was removed from the sovereign but retained by a cabinet responsible to the legislative assembly, everything the sovereign signed had to be countersigned by cabinet, the house of nobles became an elected body similar to an upper house of review, the property requirements for nobles and representatives and electors were changed, and the ability of the sovereign to make appointments to the government or civil service was diminished. The sovereign still appointed members of cabinet, but couldn't remove them unless the legislative assembly passed a vote of no confidence in them. The sovereign did retain a right of veto over legislation, which could only be overridden by a two-thirds majority of the legislative assembly.

Nobles and representatives were still required to be Hawaiian subjects, but suffrage was extended to all male residents of Hawaiian or American or European descent, including aliens, provided they could read and write and had paid taxes. To

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vote for a representative, the residential requirement was one year before an election. To vote for a noble, it was three years before an election. Asians were barred from voting, as a gesture to white man's fear of the yellow peril. Different property qualifications created two classes of voters: the first could only vote for the lower house, the second could vote for both houses.

The Bayonet Constitution was an illegal bloodless revolution. Because it had been threatened for decades, or rather for generations, it must have come as no surprise. But even if it wasn't a surprise, in a nation where sovereignty was indistinguishable from the person of the sovereign—where the existence of the commonwealth (lāhui) was the most powerful manifestation of indigenous identity—the Bayonet Constitution was a potent demonstration of the direction in which Hawaii was heading.

The reign of Liliʻuokalani

KALĀKAUA died in 1891 and was succeeded by his sister Liliʻuokalani who was determined to rule in her own right. She attempted to establish a new constitution, which combined aspects of the constitutions of 1864 and 1887. Her intention was to restore the crown's authority within the constitutional framework and to limit suffrage to Hawaiian subjects: that is, to Hawaiian citizens regardless of race. She believed the Bayonet Constitution was illegal and forced on her brother, which is true. She couldn't understand why aliens, who hadn't taken an oath of loyalty, were allowed to vote, which is understandable. But those who supported annexation to the United States prevented her from promulgating a new constitution.

Liliʻuokalani was deposed in 1893. President Cleveland sent an envoy to Hawaii to investigate. The envoy concluded that a lawful constitutional monarchy had been overthrown. Cleveland asked the provisional government to restore the monarchy but it refused and a republic was established in 1894. In 1895 Hawaiians loyal to Liliʻuokalani staged a revolt in an attempt to restore her to the throne. It was crushed and she was arrested and placed in detention for many months. In 1898, the same year Hawaii was annexed by the United States, Liliʻuokalani published her memoirs, *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen*, in which she records her side of the story, asks the reader to compare that story with all other known historical records, and make up their own minds about the truth of events. Even allowing for bias, and the benefit of hindsight, it's an impressive and incisive account, at times immensely witty, and ought to be widely read. It's available in paperback from Amazon.

In 1993 both Congress and President formally apologised to the Hawaiian people for the role the United States played in the illegal overthrow of Hawaii's

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constitutional monarchy. The flow-on effects of these apologies are enormous, and while it's difficult to compare the American apology with the recent Australian apology, because they are fundamentally different, Australians need to be aware of those differences. Also, legislation granting tribal sovereignty to native Hawaiians, the Akaka Bill, which gives them similar status as native Amerindians, keeps being re-introduced to Congress and keeps failing to pass. One of the problems with the legislation is that Hawaiians aren't, and never have been, an indigenous tribe within the United States. Their legal claims to their land are unique. Some argue the Akaka Bill is a useful first step towards reconciliation and remediation; others argue it doesn't address the real issue and simply opens Pandora's Box.

The question of Hawaiian sovereignty has broadened to accommodate the legal reality that there's no known record of Hawaii ever relinquishing its sovereignty. During the nineteenth century Hawaii was a constitutional monarchy, internationally recognised as a sovereign nation, with the full apparatus of a functioning democracy: an elected parliament, an executive, and a judicature. Debates about Hawaiian sovereignty are no longer be based on romantic ideas about a pre-contact racial and cultural commonwealth but on a multi-racial and multi-cultural kingdom's already-existent and never-extinguished sovereignty and the statutory laws of that kingdom. Put another way, because the Constitution of 1864 wasn't abrogated with the consent of the legislature, political scientists and lawyers now argue that, under international law, it's still the constitution of Hawaii as an occupied nation.

In 2000, agents representing the self-proclaimed "acting regency" for the kingdom appeared before the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague to defend a non-contentious case *Lance Paul Larsen versus the Hawaiian Kingdom*. In the body of the award handed down by the arbitrators, including Gavan Griffith QC, the sovereignty of Hawaii during the nineteenth century was acknowledged. The case wasn't submitted to arbitration. The United States wasn't a party to the proceedings and didn't consent to them. However, because of this award, the acting regency has submitted a complaint to the Security Council of the United Nations. The Security Council has accepted that complaint and will investigate it in due course.

Sovereignty and Love

APART FROM historical interest and theoretical debate, are there lessons in this article for twenty-first century Australians? Is one that we have a civic responsibility to better understand our constitutional system and the role of the crown within it? Is another that republicanism can be a disguise for vested interests which, while they

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preach democracy, are in fact anti-democratic and against the best interests of the common citizenry?

Two things remained constant in Hawaii during the nineteenth century. First, the indigenous people continued to believe their best hopes for survival as people of the land (makaʻāinana) were embodied in the person of their sovereign. Second, many local Americans continued to regard the indigenous people's love (aloha) for, and loyalty to, their sovereign as aberrant. At a time of immense upheaval, though, when the feudal idea of commonwealth as common wellbeing was replaced by the capitalist idea of general good as gross national product, that love and loyalty were the only things that couldn't be taken from the makaʻāinana. The crown is the people; the only thing that can't be owned by foreigners or annexed to the United States.

With sufficient habituation and propaganda, American interests in Hawaii prevailed. But the narrative that equates Hawaiian interests with American interests has always misrepresented the evidence; just as the narrative that Australia must inevitably mature and become a republic also misrepresents the evidence. In 1897, four years after the constitutional monarchy was illegally over thrown, more than half of Hawaii's indigenous population signed a 556-page petition against annexation, which is still in the US National Archives. It's also misleading to say that the people of Hawaii universally supported statehood in the twentieth century, since no alternative to American control was offered or discussed. Following World War II, a United Nations Charter placed Hawaii on a list of non self-governing territories with the United States as trustee. Only a plebiscite could change that status, and when a plebiscite was held in 1959 the United States only allowed two answers, yes or no, to the rhetorical question "Shall Hawaii immediately be admitted into the Union as a State?" The alternative was to remain a territory of the United States. When the issue of an Australian republic is tabled again, and the government of the day proposes a plebiscite, because it knows a referendum will fail, Australians should consider the Hawaiian experience.

The landscape of Hawaiian historiography has changed dramatically since my childhood and adolescence in Honolulu during the 1950s and 1960s, beginning with the Hawaiian cultural renaissance of the 1970s, and continuing with the apology from Congress and President in 1993. The debate has shifted from a narrative of justifying American hegemony to articulating what Hawaii achieved as a sovereign nation in the nineteenth century. Many of the real insights are coming from political science and international law. Hawaii is also blessed with primary sources and there's still a wealth of archival evidence to analyse and report.

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