

Breaking of the Kapu

Shortly after his father's death and his succession to power, Kamehameha's son Liholiho disregarded the sanctity of the kapu system that was the backbone of Hawaiian society. Encouraged by his mother, Keopuolani, and regent Ka'ahumanu, two of Kamehameha's widows, Liholiho defied tradition by allowing men and women to eat together without restriction at a feast attended by high chiefs and several foreigners. Called the 'Ai Noa, his act shook the foundation and eventually brought the demise of an entire belief system. While some priests like Hewahewa embraced the changes, others like Kekuaokalani (the keeper of Kamehameha's war god Kuka'ilimoku) rebelled. The rebellion was quickly put down, however, and the ancient gods were abandoned as temples were dismantled and idols burned.

EFFECTS OF THE ABOLITION OF THE KAPU SYSTEM

There were many effects of the abolition of the kapu system on Hawai'i and its people. We will concentrate on three effects:

1. The Hawaiians gave up their major gods (religion)

When the kapu system was abolished, the major Hawaiian gods were also done away with. When Kekuaokalani, keeper of the war god, opposed the abolition, he was killed at Kuamo'o. With the religion went the destruction of heiau, images, and other religious ceremonies. Out went the Makahiki, when orderly games were held, when taxes were collected, and when war was kapu. With the religion also went the *sanctity* (sacredness) or connection of the ali'i with the gods. They were no longer divine. Their power would have to come from something or somewhere else.

2. There was chaos and confusion as to the roles and responsibilities the people had.

The people were confused about their roles and responsibilities in the society. No longer did they have rules that would justify their positions or way of doing things. Farmers and fishermen were not sure how to ensure a good crop or good catch. The craftsmen (canoe makers, thatchers, mat makers, feather workers, etc.) did not have gods to pray to or *sanctify* (make sacred) their work. The kahuna felt deprived of the support of the kapu. The *kauwa* (outcasts) became absorbed into the society.

3. The women were liberated (freed) from many restrictions

The women were freed from many restrictions. Now they could eat men's foods, eat with men, do men's work or attain leadership positions only held by men in the past. Under the kapu, women were prohibited from certain foods, activities and positions because they were considered inferior and not chosen by the gods. They were also seen as more *profane* (vulgar, not as religious) than men. Men were associated with light. Women were associated with darkness. Ka'ahumanu especially benefited from this abolition. She was regent and ruled while Liholiho (Kamehameha II) went to London and while Kauikeaouli (Kamehameha III) was a young boy.

Missionary Thoughts on Hawaiians

Western Missionaries Initial Impression of Native Culture: The missionaries' initial view of the Native Hawaiians was that they were ignorant heathens (people without morality). However, the missionaries felt that the natives did maintain a level of intelligence which allowed for conversion and improvement. Westerners at the time believed they were obligated to improve the lives of natives. *"The Natives of the Hawaii Islands belong to the Malay race, modified by the Polynesian type. Physically, they are among the finest races in the Pacific, and they show considerable intellectual capacity. Previous to the introduction of Christianity they were not superior in moral character to any of the other savages in the Pacific. The religion of the Hawaiians was barbarous and bloodthirsty, for human sacrifices were frequently offered. On the other hand, the Hawaiians are kind, light-hearted and a pleasure-loving race."*

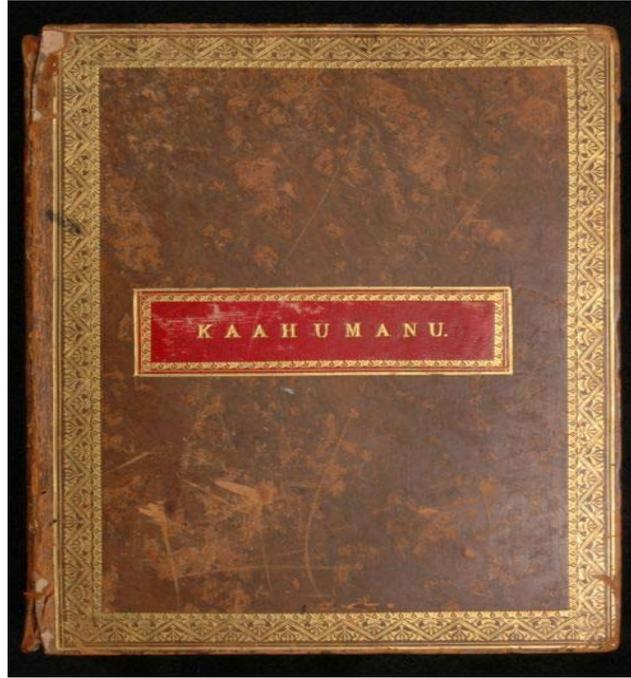
New England Christian Ideals of Education Spread to the Isles: Missionaries were extremely successful in founding schools. The schools provided for the promotion of New England Protestant (Christian) ideals (way of life). The influence in Hawaii is evident through the high conversion rates.

Weakening of the Native Way of Life: Although there were many positive affects of Missionary involvement in the Hawaiian Islands, there were many negative things that changed the Native way of life (society). Missionaries and other immigrant groups brought foreign diseases which significantly contributed to the decline in the local population. Additionally, the balance of power was shifted in favor of the United States due to the introduction of American businessmen. The Hawaiian Kingdom's love of Christianity and American Culture led to the ending of the Hawaiian way of life.

Population Decline: The spread of foreign disease led to a significant increase in the death of the Native Hawaiians, resulting in substantial population decline. "When the islands were found by the Europeans (1784) there were 1,000,000 Hawaiians but they started to die off. In 1884 only 40,000 Hawaiians remained." "The disease Leprosy is spreading and the government has established a settlement on Molokai, where sufferers of this disease are isolated."

Loss of Native Cultural Dominance: A large conversion rate to Christianity was possible due to the fall of the Native Hawaiian religion. The native language eventually died out which was most likely linked to the decline in the native population and an increase in the necessity of English for business. The English language also became dominant due to the Missionary schools. Today, only a small portion of the population can speak Hawaiian fluently. The Native dress was eventually completely substituted for more Western clothing.

The Bible of Ka‘ahumanu



Ka‘ahumanu was born of sacred rank. From birth, it was expected that this noble wahine would have a great affect on the kingdom and her marriage as favored wife to the conqueror Kamehameha was to assist in bringing about this destiny. A strong and intelligent woman, she took charge at the death of her Kamehameha in 1819 and use her position to eliminate the Kapu system, and pave the way for a powerful new religion that was to arrive only months later with the coming of the missionaries to Hawai‘i.

Much was changing at this time in Hawai‘i. European and American traders, whalers, and came to seek their fortunes in Hawai‘i. They took advantage people wanting new foreign goods, as well as the valuable but cheap Hawaiian resources and cheaply paid Hawaiian labor to replace dead traders and whalers. Along with a new trade based system of economics, these foreigners brought epidemic (no cure and passes quickly from on person to another) disease that devastated the Hawaiian population. Thousands

upon thousands of Hawaiians died from Asiatic cholera, measles, the bubonic plague, and other illnesses, decreasing the population of Hawaiians dramatically from an estimated 800,000 at the time of Cook's arrival to less than 150,000 by 1832

Arriving slightly later than the traders were Protestant missionaries from Boston. When they landed in Hawai'i in 1820, they came upon a society in which the Kapu system had been ended and people were left without religion. They were in a great position to influence the very core of Hawaiian society. They quickly realized that success among the masses meant first converting the powerful women rulers. Ka'ahumanu's conversion, meant that the missionaries now had important allies and access to power.

Ka'ahumanu's Bible is an example of the kind of multifaceted changes and influence that the missionaries and other foreign settlers had on the structure of Hawaiian government, society, and religion. This book is a prime example of the attempts made to convert the Ali'i class to Christianity. These Protestants quickly became the new "kahuna," spiritual and political advisors to the high chiefs. They affected change in Hawaiian law to fit Christian laws, and made the Hawaiian language into a written language so that the Bible could be learned by everyone. Missionary schools were opened throughout the islands to speed up Christian conversion rates and teaching Hawaiians to abandon their own culture for "civilized" Western ways.

Missionaries in Hawaii

At the center of early Hawaiian life was a complicated set of rules called "kapus." These laws were meant to maintain religious and social order and were often based on sheer logic. (Kapu means "forbidden," as does a Polynesian word "taboo.")

The first Christian missionaries arrived in Hawaii from Boston on a ship named "Thaddeus." These people were allowed by the King to preach their religion to the Hawaiian people, and they did so with great success. A large percentage of the natives converted to the new faith. Within 10 years, Protestantism was proclaimed to be the official religion of Hawaii.

Besides their preaching, the missionaries became active in other areas. They healed the sick, and they built churches and schools. They taught natives to read and write, even creating a written alphabet for the Hawaiian language. They translated the Bible and published them along with hymnbooks and textbooks.

The Americans had an influence on the way the natives dressed, especially the women. Before the coming of the missionaries, women generally wore several layers of cloth wrapped around the waist, barely reaching below the knees, and with little or nothing above the waist. Once the newcomers made their objections known, the Hawaiians changed their fashions with little complaint.

With the influence of the missionaries, the Hawaiians learned to sew their own clothes from cotton cloth or Oriental silks and fabrics. The new fashions were floor-length dresses that were loose-fitting and had long sleeves. They were easy to put together and satisfied the more modest Americans. They were described as "very feminine" and "drawn close around the neck." By 1826 it was "rare" to see a woman with uncovered breasts.

This new style of dress became known as a "mumumu" (MOO-moo). A century later the Hawaiian mumumu became fashionable in the United States. Besides the original design, there were also "holomuu," a fitted version of the mumumu, and "holoku," a holomuu with a train.

Interests of the missionaries were not limited to religion and social reforms. They became involved in internal politics and were informal advisors to kings and other members of the Hawaiian government. They even influenced passage of new laws two of those were ordinances which made adultery illegal and another enforcing observation of the Sabbath (holy Sunday). In addition, they encouraged the King to turn his government into a democracy. One reason was that they feared the country would be exploited by foreign businesses. A Constitution was written which created a legislature and a court system.

When the Board of Missions cut back on its financial support, the missionaries and their descendants began to invest in local industry, especially sugar cane mills.

One part of the early Hawaiian religion was the "hula." The word itself means "dance," and that's exactly what the hula is. With musical accompaniment (a chant or a song), the dancer moves the arms, hands, and the hips. The hand gestures tell a story.

The movements of the hula praised gods or chiefs, described long canoe voyages, described forces of nature or the scenery of Hawaii, for example.

Both men and women performed this dance until it was time for temple services. At that point, it was "men only." There the hula dancer would act out events they hoped would happen in the future. In that context it would be a prayer, speaking to the gods through the dance.

The hula was described as "creating beauty" and "combining poetry of the chant and dance movements into a great artistic experience."

When the elements of the old religion were outlawed in the 1820s, the hula was included. Missionaries believed the dance was a form of idolatry and lobbied the king to prohibit its practice.

Missionaries and Schools

The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions sent the first group of [Protestant missionaries](#) to the Hawaiian Islands in 1820 with instructions to raise up “the whole people to an elevated state of Christian civilization...” The three methods to be used to fulfill this lofty goal were preaching, teaching and printing. Initial success converting Ali‘i led the missionaries to move on to a plan for mass conversion through Christian-based education. The graduate of these schools would fill positions as leaders in the quickly developing western-style government that the missionaries would help to create. By 1850, when the schools were transferred to the government, it had graduated over four hundred Hawaiians who would exert a powerful influence over the political and social life of Hawaii’s.

The students wrote essays, chants and produced other works that reflected the Christian teachings and they ridiculed (made fun of) Hawaiians for continuing to follow ancient traditions.

Another extremely important influence of the missionaries of Lahainaluna School was its creation of the mission press that would eventually turn out one hundred and forty million newspapers. This is amazing because most of the Hawaiians were still learning to read and write.