“Kaulana Nā Pua”: A Voice for Sovereignty

One hundred years ago Queen Lili‘uokalani yielded her authority as reigning monarch of the kingdom of Hawai‘i to the United States of America. The cultural, political, and religious pain of this action is poignantly expressed by the words of the protest song “Kaulana Nā Pua,” written at that time by the queen’s friend, Ellen Kekoaohiwaikalani Wright Prendergast. After the notation for the original song was lost, a new melody line was prepared in the early 1950s for the Prendergast family by composer and pianist Maddy Kaululehuaohaili Nicholas Lam.

“Kaulana Nā Pua” is translated as “Famous are the Flowers (Children).” An original title was “He Lei No Ka Po‘e Aloha ‘Aina” (a symbol of affection for the people who love their land). It is also known as “Mele ‘Ai Pōhaku” (Stone-eating Song) or “Mele Aloha ‘Āina” (Patriot’s Song).

Written shortly after Queen Lili‘uokalani was deposed on January 17, 1893, “Kaulana Nā Pua” was a statement of rebellion. When the provisional government issued a mandate for government workers to sign a loyalty oath, many persons resisted this order, including members of the Royal Hawaiian Band. The striking bandsmen persuaded Mrs. Prendergast, a close friend of Queen Lili‘uokalani, to capture their feelings of dismay and anguish in song.

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Ellen K. Wright Prendergast was born in Honolulu on April 12, 1865 (see front cover photograph). She was educated as a Catholic at Sacred Hearts Convent, married John K. Prendergast, and was mother to two daughters and one son. She served as lady-in-waiting to Queen Lili‘uokalani and became her close confidante. In her brief life (her death occurred in Honolulu on December 5, 1902), she was recognized as a haku mele (poet) of many songs, including a name song for Lili‘uokalani, “He Inoa no Liliuokalani.”

One of her daughters, Eleanor Prendergast, described events that occurred on the day when her mother wrote “Kaulana Nā Pua”:

Mrs. Ellen Wright Prendergast was sitting on an afternoon of January 1893 in the lovely rose garden of her father’s mansion at Kapalama. Her prized guitar lay close at hand. When guests were announced, their familiar faces proved to be the troubled ones of all but two members of the Royal Hawaiian Band on strike. “We will not follow this new government,” they asserted. “We will be loyal to Liliu. We will not sign the haole’s paper, but will be satisfied with all that is left to us, the stones, the mystic food of our native land.” So they begged her to compose their song of rebellion.

Mrs. Prendergast composed the song in five verses. It became a folk song, and in the past century the figurative lyrics and rhythmic music have been interpreted and played in several versions. Educator and musician Noelani Mahoe and linguist Samuel H. Elbert presented these words in their 1970 compilation, Na Mele o Hawai‘i Nei: 101 Hawaiian Songs.

Kaulana nā pua aʻo Hawai‘i
Famous are the children of Hawai‘i

Kūpā’a mahope o ka ‘āina
Ever loyal to the land

Hiki mai ka ‘elele o ka loko ‘ino
When the evil-hearted messenger comes

Palapala ‘ānunu me ka pākaha.
With his greedy document of extortion.

Pane mai Hawai‘i moku o Keawe.
Hawai‘i, land of Keawe answers.

Kōkua nā Hono aʻo Piʻilani.
Piʻilani’s bays help.
Despite the passage of a century since the composition of "Kaulana Nā Pua," this rallying song remains a favorite political statement of bitterness and rebellion for the people of Hawai‘i who seek a return to sovereignty. Its words of fame (kaulana), stand firm (kūpa‘a), and love of the land (aloha ‘āina) support the theme of Onipa‘a (steadfast), the centennial observance of the overthrow of Queen Lili‘uokalani that was held at ‘Iolani Palace in Honolulu in January 1993. Performed at the opening ceremony, the solemn song was dedicated as a spiritual gift to the queen, the last reigning monarch of the kingdom of Hawai‘i.

This poetic music embraces onipa‘a as a commitment to Hawaiian sovereignty. The second line of the first verse, kūpa‘a mahope o ka ‘āina (ever loyal to, or firmly backing, the land), offers kūpa‘a (strong and steadfast bonding) of the ‘āina (land) that reinforces the demands of Hawaiian activists for restitution of lost lands.

A crescendo of Hawaiian songs expressing the sociological themes of a dispossessed society has burst forth since statehood in 1959. Native Hawaiians have suffered from altered lifestyles pres-
sured by loss of land and beaches, urbanization, rapid expansion of commercialized tourism, significant increase in numbers of residents and visitors, development of highways and airports, environmental deterioration, and economic instability. These changes that severely impact on Hawaiian culture have become the subject for lyrics of popular protest music. "If you see something wrong," explained Jerry Santos when he was losing his leased land in Olomana, O'ahu, in the 1970s, "what better way to let 100 people, 1000 people, 2000 people know about it than to sing a song about it?"6

In 1895 "Kaulana Nā Pua" appeared as the first text in a collection of 104 poems and songs from various Hawaiian newspapers, including the pro-royalist Ka Makaainana, published in a book, Buke Mele Lahui.7 It was titled "Mele Aloha Aina (Ai-Pohaku)," and the lyricist was listed as "Kekoaohiwaikalani," the Hawaiian name of Mrs. Prendergast (fig. 1). The words in this early edition differed slightly from those presented by Noelani Mahoe and Samuel Elbert in 1970, although the meaning remains intact.

Wendell Silva, director of the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts, explained the changes in the wording found in later versions of the song: "Lyrics convey the mana of thought. As songs are traditionally passed on, the lyrics may change from island to island and from time to time to reflect the musician's perspective depending upon how he wants to express his feelings from the heart."8

The lyrics mention four sacred chiefs that represent the major islands of the Hawaiian chain: Keawe of the Big Island of Hawai‘i, Pi‘ilani of Maui, Mano of Kaua‘i, and Kakuhihewa of O‘ahu. The words are treated with a spiritual tone of reverence and respect. Owing to its religious implications, the song is not included among the repertoire of popular Hawaiian dances. On special occasions when it is performed as a hula, the dancers may remain still without body movement, using graceful hands to interpret the meaning of the words. They customarily wear black holokū (a loose, seamed dress with a train).9

In its literary form, the poetry of "Kaulana Nā Pua" uses a traditional pattern of four lines to a verse. The song is a Hawaiian adaptation of a Western style that expresses a political statement
In 1895 “Mele Aloha Aina,” later called “Kaulana Nā Pua,” was published in Buke Mele Lahui using Ellen Prendergast’s Hawaiian name, Kekoaohiwaikalani. (HMCS.)
of protest against the loss of civil rights. Analyzing the relationship of Hawaiian poetry to religion and politics, John Charlot describes this chant:

The song [“Kaulana Nā Pua”] protests verbally against past and possible future actions and uses moral suasion and the weight of public opinion rather than threats of physical violence. Most important, the dispute is described not as intracultural—between chiefs—but intercultural, between Hawaiian and Western culture. The ‘enemy’ (stanza 3, line 2) is described as having loko ‘ino “evil insides” (st. 1, l. 3). Rather than oral, face-to-face communication, he uses written documents, pepa (st. 3, l. 2), and palapala (st. 1, l. 4), a word still used bitterly by some Hawaiians to describe the rules established by an alien culture to favor its own members. The palapala is ‘ānunu “greedy” (st. 1, l. 4),11 considered a serious vice in a society based on generous hospitality. Western culture is depicted as basically mercantile; money is its highest value. The enemy would kū‘ai hewa “wrongfully sell out” (st. 3, l. 3) the natives’ pono sivila “civil rights” (st. 3, l. 4).12

Hawaiian culture, on the other hand, is characterized by the fact that it does not minamina “value, cherish, care for” the pu‘ukūlā “hill of dollars” offered by the new government (st. 4, ll. 1f.). Hawaiians support the queen (st. 5, l. 1) and, by implication, their civil rights (st. 3, l. 4). But the poet sees an even more basic dimension in Hawaiian culture: the Hawaiian’s relationship to the land, the natural pu‘u “hill” rather than the hill of dollars. Hawaiians kūpa‘a “stand firm” in support of the land (st. 1, l. 2). They want to obtain the pono of the land (st. 5, l. 2), an evocation of the saying of Kamehameha III. These actions are the result of the fact that Hawaiians are ka po‘e i aloha i ka ʻāina “the people who love the land” (st. 5, l. 5). In fact the song was referred to as Ke Mele Aloha ʻĀina “The Song of the Love of the Land.”13

Koana is a special ingredient of Hawaiian chants that offers hidden meaning. Through the clever manipulation of the figurative language, the composer can give a double entendre that is understood only by persons familiar with the circumstances of the writing.

The quality of koana is a unique and significant component of “Kaulana Nā Pua.” Poetic imagery veils important secondary thoughts that appear in the lyrics.14 Defenders of the queen could
sing this protest song with inner pleasure, content with the knowledge that the outwardly benign words and gay tune masked the stronger feelings that the casual listener did not comprehend. The song has been called an “underground” anthem of Hawai’i.  

Another name given to this chant, “Mele ‘Ai Pōhaku” (Stone-eating Song), implies a deeper spiritual level found in the Hawaiian words. Pō means night, darkness, the realm of the gods, the nightfall as a beginning of the Hawaiian day; haku refers to master, overlord, stone, and to put in order; ku, among many interpretations, is to stand, rise, transform. The goddess Pele is sometimes called ka wahine ‘ai pōhaku, or the stone-eating woman, who controls the land by being the keeper and producer of the rocks. Pōhaku (rocks) becomes a kaona word with a double meaning that may bring good or bad fortune.

Ua lawa mākou i ka pōhaku
I ka ‘ai kamahā‘o o ka ‘āina.

Charlot offers a literary interpretation of the rocks found in Mrs. Prendergast’s poetry:

The Hawaiians have been dispossessed and are reduced to what, for the non-Hawaiian, appears to be worthless. But the poet transforms this pejorative expression into a positive description of Hawaiian culture. The rock is lawa “enough, sufficient.” The needs are basic. The rock is indeed ‘ai “food.” That food is kama-ha‘o, a religious term used by Lunalilo in his anthem for the name of the king.

The Hawaiian eats the rock and is formed by it into a pua [flower/child] of Hawai‘i. He brings the land inside of himself and thus becomes one with it. At the same time, the land becomes his. A chief is ‘ai moku “eater or ruler of the island or land section.” The land is the Hawaiian’s in the Hawaiian sense of tenancy or usufruct, rather than the Western sense of private property. That is, the Hawaiian rejects monetary prosperity in favor of sovereignty as defined by his own traditions.

While the words indicate a resistance to the tragic circumstances that surrounded the overthrow of the monarchy, the rhythmic pattern of the current version of the music offers a
happy tune that belies its deeper sentiment. The Greek word *melos*
resembles the Hawaiian word *mele* for songs and chants, and epic
poems of the Greeks have been compared to *mele* of Hawai‘i as
recitations in metric form of the power and glory of events and
people.20

According to music scholar Helen Cadwell:

Rhythms of 2-4 and 4-4 seemed most natural to the old Hawai-
ians, and the ancient *mele* were characterized by remarkable
changes of time and syncopated effects. They were greatly lacking
in melody, as before the arrival of the missionaries in the nine-
teenth century, the Hawaiians had no acquaintance with the full
range of the intervals that make up the diatonic scale. They had a
limited use of the intervals that might be compared to the third,
ﬁfth, and fourth, and like the Arab and the Hindu, they appre-
ciated intervals smaller than our half tone.21

The *mele* includes many forms of poetical statements.22

Nathaniel B. Emerson, in his *Unwritten Literature of Hawaii*,
describes chants that introduce several notes with short verses of
ﬁxed rhythmical length:

The ﬁrst thing that will strike the auditor on listening to this primi-
tive music, is its lack of melody; the voice goes wavering and lilting
like a canoe on a rippling ocean; then, of a sudden, it swells
upward as if lifted by the same ﬂuctuating movement, it descends
back to its ﬁrst monotone, until again moved to rise on the wings
of a fresh impulse. The intervals sounded may be a third, a ﬁfth or
a fourth, but the whole movement leads nowhere, like an unﬁn-
ished sentence. Yet, in spite of all these drawbacks and of this
childish immaturity, the amateur and enthusiast ﬁnds himself
charmed and held as in the clutch of some Old World spell. . . .23

“Kaulana Nā Pua” is identiﬁed by ethnomusicologist Amy
Stillman as a form of *hula ku‘i*, or interpretive hula, that appeared
during the reign of King Kalākaua (1874–1891).24 The *hula
ku‘i* was created to synthesize traditional Hawaiian music styles
with foreign patterns, including tempos of the waltz and the
The poetry is strophic, or organized into couplet verses of two lines of text. Unlike most hula ku‘i, this song consists of five verses of four lines. It concludes with the popular ending “Ha‘ina ‘ia mai ana ka puana” (the story is told) and restates the theme “Ka po‘e i aloha i ka ‘āina” (the people who love their land).

A musical phrase known as a vamp separates the verses of the hula ku‘i. In early performances of this song in the late nineteenth century, Western string instruments, including guitar, ‘ukulele, and later steel guitar, as well as traditional instruments of ipu heke (double gourd drum), ‘uli-‘uli (feathered gourd rattles), and other native products were used for musical accompaniment. Now “Kaulana Nā Pua” is arranged for production by all instruments of the band and orchestra.

As a folksong, “Mele ‘Ai Pōhaku” was well known among native Hawaiians. The song was sung on February 1, 1894, the royalist anniversary of the resignation of Royal Hawaiian Band members who had relinquished their jobs rather than sign an oath of loyalty to the Republic of Hawai‘i. Historian Albertine Loomis reported:

One who heard the band boys sing it on the anniversary of their defiance said it had on the Hawaiians the effect of the “Marseillaise” on the French—”exciting and exasperating.” The hula ku‘i business (stamping, heel-twisting, thigh-slapping, dipping of knees, doubling of fists) almost drowned out the words, but the fierce loyalty was written in every shining face. Over and over they beat out the rhythm, thumping their drums and miming their scorn of the “paper of the enemy,” of the “heap of government money.” It was a pledge renewed. They had not thought it would be so long before President Cleveland kept his word, but they would wait.

The song was featured in October 1894 at a ceremonial dedication of a park named Uluhaimalama (as the plants grow up out of the dark earth into the light, so shall light come to the nation). The park was given to the people by Queen Lili‘uokalani from some of her lands in Pauoa Valley. Kathleen Dickenson Mellen explained the event:
Jittery and insecure, the Republic of Hawaii forbade all large gatherings and kept the city of Honolulu under constant surveillance. To outwit them, Hawaiians devised a secret method of passing along information by means of newly composed songs with double meanings.

She described the presentation of the song at Uluhaimalama:

When the encircling trees and flowers had all been planted there came next an emotional ceremony rooted in remote antiquity. A small mound of earth had been prepared on top of which a simple stone, symbolic of the creation of Mother Earth, was placed while the chanter intoned: “The land is the only living thing. Men are mortal. The land is the Mother that never dies.” And as the rich earth was patted by loving hands around the base of the stone the people sang, softly, *Mele Aloha ‘Āina* (Song of the Land We Love) composed by Kekoa-kalani Prendergast in reply to a government threat that Hawaiians failing to take the oath of allegiance would be “forced to eat stones.”

During the first half of the twentieth century, “Kaulana Nā Pua” was not recorded in any public performance. Hawai‘i was subject to changing times: the hostility of 1893 related to the overthrow of Queen Lili‘uokalani softened with the passage of years and with the inclusion of Hawaiians in positions of political power in the Territory of Hawai‘i. John Kelly, Jr., author of *Folk Songs Hawaii Sings*, commented: “It is important to give folk music room for diversity. As a vehicle for spontaneous feelings, folk songs are oriented to conditions that may need to be changed. The flexibility of human responses may modify its composition.”

The melody that Mrs. Prendergast composed in 1893 was never written for publication, and several versions may have been sung. “Interpretive devices of the folk singer, word inflections, and nuances that bring the song to life are difficult if not impossible to notate adequately,” Kelly explained. According to Lorna Prendergast-Dunne, granddaughter of Mrs. Prendergast, the original notation for the music was lost.

After World War II a renaissance of Hawaiian culture encour-
aged revival of interest in old Hawaiian mele. Eleanor Prendergast carried her mother’s lyrics to the Honolulu music studio of Hawaiian musicians Mrs. Maddy K. N. Lam (fig. 2) and Mrs. Milla Leal Peterson Yap. “Maddy accepted the lyrics of ‘Kaulana Nā Pua,’ recited the words, sat down at her piano, and composed
a gentle, rhythmic, cheerful *mele,*” said Mrs. Yap in January 1993, recalling the visit of Ellen Prendergast’s daughter to their studio in the early 1950s.\(^{31}\)

“Eleanor Prendergast liked Maddy’s music. ‘You do whatever is necessary to help make the song,’ she told Mrs. Lam, a talented musician who had provided musical documentation for many compositions, including works by Hawaiian scholar Mary Kawena Pukui. Maddy Lam completed the piece and filled out the necessary copyright forms in the name of Ellen Prendergast. Eleanor Prendergast was surprised that Maddy Lam’s name was not listed as the composer, but Maddy was the type of person who did not seek credit,” explained Mrs. Yap.

The earliest known publication of “Kaulana Nā Pua” appears in *Authentic Tunes from the Tropics and Tahiti, Book No. 8,* with a 1955 copyright (fig. 3).\(^ {32}\) Another arrangement was printed in the 1979 *Don Ho Songbook,* and the copyright was renewed by Criterion Music Corporation in 1983.\(^ {33}\)

**KAULANA NA PUA**

(Chant Of The Islands)

![Music notation](image_url)

**Fig. 3.** This version of “Kaulana Nā Pua” is found in *Authentic Tunes from the Tropics and Tahiti, Book 8* (1967). (Reproduced by permission of Criterion Music Corporation.)
'Iolani Luahine, a foremost interpreter of ancient Hawaiian hula, presented the song to the Annie Kerr Trio for its first public performance in the late 1950s at the McKinley High School concert auditorium. "'Iolani Luahine made it clear that 'Kaulana Nā Pua' was not a dance but a lyric to be offered in reverent interpretation," explained Healani Doane, who observed this program and a subsequent presentation at 'Iolani Palace by hula master and chanter Henry Moikehaokahiki Pa.\textsuperscript{34}"

In the early 1960s Noelani Mahoe and the Leo Nahenahe Singers included "Kaulana Nā Pua" in their album \textit{Folksongs of Hawai‘i}.\textsuperscript{35} Noelani Mahoe and Ka‘upena Wong sang the song at the University of Hawai‘i in 1964. Pete Seeger, a visiting artist and folk singer, was touched by its haunting message and bright music, and he requested its introduction to an international group at a world folk music festival in Newport, Rhode Island.

During the past thirty years, "Kaulana Nā Pua" has been widely performed by Hawai‘i’s most prominent singers and artists. The subtext, describing the Hawaiians’ feelings of dispossession in their own land and their statement to stand firm, has been included on many recording documents, and musicians have translated and interpreted the \textit{kaona} (hidden meaning) in the lyrics to a broad audience.

Reflecting Onipa‘a’s theme of steadfastness at the 1993 centennial commemorative observance of the overthrow of Queen Lili‘uokalani, "Kaulana Nā Pua" serves as a voice for the native Hawaiians in their protest against loss of self-determination and sovereignty. The powerful and reverent song symbolizes a pride of culture and a plea for understanding as they seek restitution for their loss of Hawai‘i ‘āina.

\textbf{NOTES}

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1 Liliuokalani, *Hawaii’s Story by Hawaii’s Queen* (1898; Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1964) 354.
5 This sentence is not found in the 1895 version of the lyrics.
9 “Famous are the Flowers,” *Ka’a‘awa Magazine* (7 July 1983): 21; Noelani Mahoe, personal communication. Mahoe observed this solemn hula performed at a beautiful dedication program at ‘Iolani Palace. The dancers were dressed in black *holoku*, and they remained in one place while expressing the meaning of the words through graceful arm and hand movements.
10 During the Civil War of the United States (1861–65), a protest song of the Blacks was “Dixie Land”: “In Dixieland I’ll take my stand, to live and die in Dixie.”
11 This word was given as *alunu* in the original lyrics. According to Mary Kawena Pukui and Samuel H. Elbert, *Hawaiian Dictionary* (Honolulu: U of Hawai‘i P, 1971) 24, ‘ānulu and ‘ānunu may be used as variants of ‘alunu for the word “greed.”
This reads as *pono kivila* (st. 4, l. 4) in the 1895 version of the song.


25. Lorna Prendergast-Dunne, personal communication.

26. Milla Yap, personal communication. Yap was present when Maddy Lam was asked to prepare the musical notation for “Kaulana Nā Pua.” Among the many well-known compositions by Maddy Lam are “Singing Bamboo,” “Maile Lei,” and “Pua ‘Ahihi.”

Michael Goldsen, Criterion Music Corporation, personal communication.

Healani Doane, personal communication. Doane is the daughter of Mrs. Julia Keliiiaa Chilton, who was the first soloist for the Royal Hawaiian Band and a Hawaiian language scholar.

Martha H. Noyes, "We Will Eat Stones," Honolulu 27.7 (Jan. 1993): 22.