

TITLE: “The Black Queen”: Antiracism and State-Sovereignty in the Colonization of Hawai‘i

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT:

Native Hawaiians scholars have documented how colonists worked to racialize Hawaiians as Black or as White depending on their views on U.S. annexation and incorporation of Hawai‘i (Silva 2004, Arvin 2019). In particular, some settler colonists claimed that the reigning Monarch, Queen Lili‘uokalani was of African descent in order to delegitimize her authority and Hawai‘i state sovereignty more broadly. Currently, no sociological or historical research has been done to understand Black views on the “negrofication” of Hawaiians during contentious periods of colonial politics. In this paper, I analyze archives from the Black press during and after the 1893 haole-led overthrow of the Hawaiian Monarchy to investigate how Black Americans understood and response to settler colonial attempts to discredit Hawaiian sovereignty through antiracism discourses.

For example, the *Washington Bee* was a Black newspaper which ran from 1882 to 1922. Starting in 1890, the *Washington Bee* began publishing letters between Robert Wilcox, a Kanaka activist and revolutionary, and Celso Caesar Moreno, the Minister of Foreign Affairs under Hawaiian King David Kalākaua. The newspaper also published free-standing pieces about the situation in Hawai‘i. Stories otherwise unrelated to this period of Hawai‘i’s history often referenced the events as they were a part of the political and imperial milieu. In a short piece published in 1890 about the notion of a “negro aristocracy,” the author argued that perhaps “Africa, Hawaiian Island [sic] and the like, can boast of negro aristocracy” but not the Black populations in America.¹ This was not the last time the newspaper would ascribe Blackness to Kanaka Maoli. Notions of Hawaiians as Black by the Black press did not serve to delegitimize sovereignty. They compared Hawaiian’s resistance to colonization to Black resistance to colonizers who preached Christianity but were otherwise greedy

and hypocritical. The Bee published quotations from other Black newspapers around the continental U.S. One included an excerpt from the *People's Advocate* which described the events in Hawai'i as follows:

A few white Americans and foreigners last year displaced the black queen from her throne and set up a republic officed by person who were not natives of the country.ⁱⁱ

The excerpt went on to praise President Cleveland (though a democrat) for his desire to have the Queen reinstated to the throne and his hesitancy to move towards annexation. Another excerpt from the *Denver Exponent* similarly praised Cleveland and noted that “[i]f the Hawaiian Government is offensive to these American usurpers they should return to the United States. America has enough negroes to butcher, and the rethroning of the Hawaiian Queen is a victory for justice and right.” Many other newspapers referred to Queen Lili'uokalani as “a negro woman of acknowledged African descent.”ⁱⁱⁱ These moments did not place Hawaiians as stateless beings, subject to the inevitable march of settler colonial expansion and rule. By claiming Queen Lili'uokalani as Black, these newspapers drew parallels between the dispossession, enslavement, and subjugation of Black Africans and the current situation in Hawai'i.

The Black Press articulated a solidarity against White encroachment on a free nation. On October 14, 1893 *The Washington Bee* published the following unauthored paragraph:

The missionaries in Hawai'i are for the good native Hawaiians a calamity worse than leprosy. We know thas [sic] is true and we eight millions of free colored Americans will see that no wrong be gone to our brothers of Hawaii now and in the future. Long live Hawaii.^{iv}

Black writers depicted Hawaiians as Black insofar as they were fighting for sovereignty and autonomy. Some articulations also demonstrated a reverence for the Hawaiian state as superior to other nation-states. Accounts pushed back against the vilification of Monarchical rule that informed the debates about annexation. In a letter to Celso Caesar Moreno, a person referred to as Esq. a Jno.

E. Bush argued that monarchical governments are preferable to what the U.S. currently had as a form of government.¹ He explained that, “Monarchical England today is more democratic, freer and juster [sic] and more impartially governed and safer to live in than America is today. The Lawlessness and anarchy in American today is the best evidence to prove the charge against men’s failure to carry out these immutable principles of government which she has embodied upon her statues.” These writings were situated in a specific historical context in which U.S. political leaders and security agencies were responding to grassroots anarchic movements. They combatted settler colonial antiblackness in complicated ways. This paper therefore contributes to understandings of racialization in settler colonial contexts, Black and Indigenous solidarities, and theories of race and the state.

ⁱ (1890, January 18) *The Washington bee*. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn84025891/1890-01-18/ed-1/>.

ⁱⁱ (1890, March 15) *The Washington bee*. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn84025891/1890-03-15/ed-1/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ 1890, March 15) *The Washington bee*. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn84025891/1890-03-15/ed-1/>.

^{iv} *The Washington bee*. (Washington, DC) 14 Oct. 1893, p. 2. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/sn84025891/1893-10-14/ed-1/.