

ACCLAIM FOR TOM COFFMAN'S

# Nation Within

"*Nation Within* is a refreshing new look at a Hawai'i known to most Americans for Pearl Harbor and beautiful beaches. This book gives us the untold story, the history we were not given in school, placing Hawai'i inside the larger picture of U.S. expansion into the Pacific. What we learn is sobering, and fascinating."

—HOWARD ZINN, author of *A People's History of the United States*

"This book raises important and still unresolved issues about the annexation of Hawai'i by the United States, explaining that the U.S. Senate would not approve the proposed treaty of annexation, that virtually all Native Hawaiians opposed annexation, and that the ultimate procedure used—a joint resolution passed by a simple majority of both chambers of Congress—was controversial at the time and was questioned by constitutional scholars in the decades that followed. *Nation Within* is much livelier than the usual history book, but also much more detailed, carefully researched, and thoughtful than most journalism."

—JON M. VAN DYKE, Professor of Constitutional Law, University of Hawai'i, author of *Who Owns the Crown Lands of Hawai'i?*

"No one has taken the time to explicitly search out the relationships between and among Americans who stole our independence with as much tenaciousness and perspicacity as *Nation Within*. Even better is [Tom Coffman's] exemplary analysis of how the Japanese threat to the Islands was essentially created by confused and greed-inspired policies in the republic and outright deception at the U.S. State Department level. But what I found most valuable about this work was his portrayal of the republic as an opportunistic masquerade of democratic ideals that swindled an entire nation of its inheritance. In no other history that I've seen is the cynical and manipulative nature of annexation so clearly displayed. His ironic recounting of how voting under the republic was to be constructed in such a way as to adopt all of the finest traditions of the Jim Crow South tells us all we need to know about the nature of the government that surrendered the nation of Hawai'i to the United States. ... [Coffman's] analysis of Lili'uokalani's leadership is sensitive and perceptive. ... To this date I have not seen a more believable analysis of the queen's leadership, nor a more compelling analysis of the failure of President Cleveland's leadership in the end."

—JON KAMAKAWIWO'OLE OSORIO, author of *Dismembering Lahui: A History of the Hawaiian Nation to 1887*, Professor of Hawaiian Studies, University of Hawai'i at Manoa, from *The Hawaiian Journal of History*

“The story of how Hawai‘i lost its independence and was annexed to the United States is as fascinating and important as it is unknown. *Nation Within* is a passionate and deeply researched account of this tragedy. It is essential reading for anyone who wants to understand how the U.S. became what it is today.”

— STEPHEN KINZER, author of *Overthrow: America’s Century of Regime Change from Hawaii to Iraq*

“As a historian, Tom has done a tremendous job in revealing the events and circumstances that led to the illegal overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom government in 1893. More importantly, however, he unveils how the Queen and Hawaiian subjects were politically and legally astute and were able to organize themselves, in the aftermath of the overthrow, into a formidable political force that prevented the annexation of the country by treaty. While they succeeded in preventing the U.S. Senate from ratifying two attempts to annex the country by treaty, they were unable to prevent the U.S. Congress from unilaterally enacting a joint resolution of annexation (in the heat of the Spanish-American War) that served as the basis to illegally seize and occupy the nation of Hawai‘i for military purposes—an occupation that is now over a century long.”

— KEANU SAI, Political Scientist

“A far-reaching treasure hunt for long-buried facts, revealing for the first time the full array of events and shifting international forces that led to the overthrow and annexation of the Kingdom of Hawaii. ... [N]ot to be missed.”

— HERB KAWAINUI KANE, artist/historian, author of *Ancient Hawaii*

“Tom Coffman has gracefully constructed a new vision of Hawaiian history, broader perhaps than any produced in the last 100 years. ... A stunning, trans-oceanic story.”

— KEHAULANI LUM, *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*

“... a page-turner—and an eye-opener.”

— HONOLULU WEEKLY

“Written with power and clarity, *Nation Within* narrates a history of dispossession but also of complicity and resistance. It correctly situates Hawai‘i’s annexation within the global context of U.S. imperialism; it insightfully points out that the nation was never completely extinguished because Hawai‘i continues to stir within the hearts of the Hawaiian people.”

— GARY Y. OKIHIRO, Professor of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, author of *Island World: A History of Hawai‘i and the United States*

"*Nation Within* is the most original and best researched account I know on the U.S. annexation of Hawaii—and the Hawaiians' opposition, then and now, to that annexation. The story is compelling for many reasons, not least the Hawaiians' trust that the American democratic process would protect their independence and their lands."

— **WALTER LA FEBER**, Cornell University, author of *The New Empire : An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898*

"All Americans who wish to understand how and why the United States annexed Hawaii in 1898 should read this book. Tom Coffman has forever dispelled the commonly held belief that annexation was a benign and inevitable process of self-determination. Readers of *Nation Within* also will come to understand why Native Hawaiians today seek justice and reconciliation from an American government that usurped and destroyed their national sovereignty a century ago."

— **EDWARD P. CRAPOL**, Professor of History, College of William and Mary

"*Nation Within* explores those 'strange five years' from 1893-1898 during which a cabal of 'missionary boys' hijacked a sovereign nation, deposed its monarch, prostituted the words 'republic' and 'democracy' as badly as any Third World Communist dictator ever has, and handed over an unwilling native people to the care and keeping of the breast-beating, muscle-flexing expansionist United States. (And if you think I overwrite, then I challenge you to read the book.) ... weep, grow angry ... "

— **DAN BOYLAN**, Professor of History, University of Hawaii, *MidWeek*

"By far the best account of the long subversion and eventual destruction of the independent kingdom of Hawaii by American businessmen and politicians is Tom Coffman's *Nation Within*, now available in this new edition. Annexation was the consequence of great historical forces including capitalism, imperialism, expansionism, and militarism but it was also the consequence of the actions and inactions of a great assortment of historical actors in both Honolulu and Washington, D.C., who rise up out of these pages so vividly—villains and heroes alike—that it is as if it is all just now happening for the first time. The portrait of Queen Lili'uokalani bravely defending her country in the cold, wintry U.S. capital four years after her overthrow is unforgettably poignant and should dispel for all time the lie of Hawaiians' willing complicity in the fate that overtook them. A master both of narrative and explanation, Coffman ties together human motives and political strategies in an unusually clear and persuasive way. By giving the Hawaiians' resistance to domination a past, he also helps give it a future. He makes Hawaiian history make sense."

— **ELINOR LANGER**, author of "Famous are the Flowers: Hawaiian Resistance Then—And Now," Special Issue of *The Nation*, April 28, 2008

## **ALSO BY TOM COFFMAN**

### **BOOKS**

*Catch a Wave: A Case Study of Hawaii's New Politics* (1971)

*From Japan to Hawai'i: My Journey, with H. S. Kawakami* (1974)

*The Island Edge of America: A Political History of Hawai'i* (2003)

### **DOCUMENTARY FILMS**

*Ganbare: Don't Give Up* (1994)

*O Hawai'i: From Settlement to Kingdom* (1995)

*Nation Within: The Annexation of Hawai'i by the United States* (1998)

*May Earth Live* (2000)

*Arirang: The Korean American Journey* (2002)

*Arirang: The Korean American Dream* (2003)

*The First Battle: The Battle for Equality in War-Time Hawai'i* (2006)

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Revised Edition

Tom Coffman

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## *Foreword*

MANULANI ALULI MEYER

*Truth is the highest goal,  
and aloha is the greatest truth of all.*

—HALEMAKUA

*Nation Within* is a truth telling embedded within a Hawaiian cultural context, yet relevant to the world. History told from a different interpretation changes *everything*. Author Tom Coffman speaks of Hawaiian people as a “separate society that calls out across time to be understood in its own terms.” (page 10) What a relief to read such ideas! As if the drought ended and water returned to fields, crops and our own disposition. Finally, there is a reckoning in our collective consciousness that *Hawaii is an independent country illegally occupied by the United States of America*.

I remember receiving a phone call from my sister Maile in 1996, while I was studying abroad, about Noenoe Silva finding the 1898 Anti-Annexation Petition in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. It was a document signed by 38,000+ Hawaiians and other loyalists declaring their unwavering *aloha* for their Hawaiian Nation and beloved Queen Lili‘uokalani. They were asking for the return of their Hawaiian government, illegally overthrown by missionary-descended, business elite five years earlier. My grandfather, Noa Webster Aluli, was seventeen years old when he signed this piece of living history. The petition holds the names of all my aunties, uncles, cousins, grandparents, and great-grandparents. I recall sobbing when

I finally got to see my *kupuna* signatures shaped in beautiful flowing cursive strokes. It changed us all because *we didn't know*. By 1900, the petition was hidden in the propaganda of post-overthrown Hawaii and never mentioned in history texts or tourist summaries.

We were taught that Hawaiians wanted and asked for annexation, but, as Tom Coffman explains, "Their petitions said the native people had not been consulted on the proposed dissolution of their nation. Nor was the Republic of Hawaii a republic, but rather a tyranny of the many by the few, bolstered by the nearly continuous presence of U.S. warships." (page 2) Almost every Hawaiian alive during that time put their signature to paper to tell the American people and government they *did not* want annexation. My great-grandmother's sister, Aima Nawahi, was the wife of Joseph Nawahi. Both worked in their respective chapters of *Hui Aloha Aina* to facilitate the Anti-Annexation Petition throughout the islands—by canoe, by mule, by horse, by foot, by word of mouth. Reading about their involvement, their passion, their commitment to the love of land and people has strengthened our family.

This *new* knowledge in *Nation Within* that you are about to read is unknown to most of America and still not taught at mainstream schools in Hawaii. A good historian tells a story in a cultural *context*, and, when this occurs, our *seeing* of the *content* has the opportunity to mature. Here is a rare chance for growth!

The truth then becomes evident: Hawaiians have survived, and the essence of our knowing has taught me many things, including that there *is* a Hawaiian nation-within and we thrive beyond a tourist and military economy. We have reestablished the role of *aloha* in the development of *intelligence* and thus our sustainability with people and land. *Change is here*. The new edition of this book is proof. *Nation Within* is a piece of the larger puzzle situated within an even larger movement that encourages self-reflection and understanding so we can get along better. It is summarized best by *kumu hula* Olana Kaipo Ai: *Aloha is the intelligence with which we meet life*.

*I could not turn back the time for the political change, but there is still time to save our heritage. You must remember never cease to act because you fear you may fail. The way to lose any earthly kingdom is to be too inflexible, intolerant, and prejudicial. Another way is to be too flexible, tolerant of too many wrongs, and without judgment at all. It is a razor's edge. It is the width of a blade of pili grass. To gain the kingdom of heaven is to hear what is not said, to see what cannot be seen, and to know the unknowable—that is Aloha. (QUEEN LILI'UOKALANI)*

If *aloha* is our intelligence, what does an intelligence of compassion look like? And what of truth? As a Native Hawaiian, I have come to understand there is relative truth and absolute truth. The contents of this book are indeed relative, but the energy that brought them forth is absolute. The ideas contained within this mosaic of stories and events are of high impact. They bring wisdom and animating purpose that helps me write from a place of forgiveness and compassion. Authors such as Tom Coffman affirm the *kuleana* of my family. The story of Hawaii's annexation is now being offered to a wider audience, who may be ready to learn about a place and people shaped by *aloha*. It is no coincidence that the current president, Barack Obama, came from this place. The role of *aloha* is clear and instructive when he said to the world: *Our differences define us, they do not divide us.*

Liberating truth telling will always help humanity evolve.

*Mau ke aloha no Hawaii.*  
Love always for Hawaii.

Dr. Manulani Aluli Meyer  
Alaelama, Hilo One  
Moku O Keawe  
February 20, 2009



## *Introduction*

When an understanding of history is trampled in the street, its best chance for survival may be in the shelter of odd doorways. Places like the Tusitala Book Store in Kailua, O'ahu, become important, because Tusitala tries to keep the dust level down, and it deals in old and out-of-print books. *The Transformation of Hawaii* survived on the shelf of the Tusitala Store, not to quickly set the record straight—which would be too simple—but to give clues about the distortion of the history of Hawai'i.

The first paragraph gets directly to the book's work. The Hawaiian Islands were annexed to the United States "not by purchase, nor by conquest... (but) *by the vote of the Hawaiian people, who offered them to us as a gift.*" The writer's name is Belle M. Brain, who, according to the book's spine, wrote *Stories of Missions*. The copyright date is startling, because the U.S. Congress voted to annex Hawai'i in July 1898 and *Transformation* came out in September, at a time when typesetting was slow and distance mattered.

And now Belle's book comes back around after a century, and its pages open to suggest why so little is known about the past. For example (I will be brief), the period during which 90 percent of the Hawaiian people died is a period of remarkable progress, while in their pre-Western condition it would be "hard to conceive of a more depraved race of beings." Problems of "corruption and misrule" by the Hawaiian monarchs led to the overthrow of the native government. Bumps lay in the road, but when annexation occurred, the enthusiasm of the Hawaiians "knew no bounds."

There is a certain isolation that results from going back to the Tusitala Book Store for a second time, the second day warmer than the first, in the dust, struggling to decide whether Belle's small volume is now worth forty-five dollars. But for the Hawaiians there was a certain isolation in having their country taken, and then being told it was a lovely gift.

WHEN I ARRIVED IN HAWAI'I in 1965, the effective definition of history had been reduced to a few years. December 7, 1941, was practically the beginning of time, and anything that might have happened before that was prehistory. Hawai'i had finally been accepted as a state in 1959, and justice had been done. From the stylebook of the morning newspaper, disconcertingly named *The Honolulu Advertiser*, where I had my first reporting job, I learned that the word statehood was always to be capitalized. The year 1965 was the sixth year of Statehood. I am acutely aware only now that I began writing a book in 1970 by saying (paragraph one) that the year 1970 was the eleventh year of Statehood, and Hawai'i "was still young."

Many years passed before I realized that for Native Hawaiians to survive as a people, they needed a definition of time that spanned something more than eleven years. The demand for a changed understanding of time was always implicit in what became known as the Hawaiian Movement or the Hawaiian Renaissance, because Hawaiians so systematically turned to the past whenever the subject of Hawaiian life was glimpsed. Indeed they were often critiqued for looking back, which in the self-confident vocabulary of America in the 1960s was akin to being backward-looking.

While this past to which a certain minority of Hawaiians looked may have lacked definition, it inescapably had something to do with the events that Belle M. Brain had helped cover up. Slowly, through many experiences in dusty places, we have been compelled as a society to deal with the essential question of Hawai'i's past, which is the question of what happened to the Hawaiian people. What really happened? Like good journalism, good history is supposed to be balanced and tell both sides of the story. But what if history is mute, and the essence of the story is hidden? What if there is a past, but there is no satisfactory definition of history?

THROUGH THE WIDELY SCATTERED activities of a relatively small number of individuals, I witnessed fragments of the resurgence of Hawaiian life. One of these individuals particularly excelled—both in his writing and in his brilliant conversation—at making the issue of time and history explicit. His name was John Dominis Holt. John Holt was both charming and brainy, and the doors of American society were open to him at many levels, but he chose to embrace his fellow Hawaiians and the Hawaiian past. He dared to grieve aloud. He paid tribute to the queen, raged, and laughed darkly. He went back and back. He studied the archives of Belle Brain's primary informants, the descendants of the missionaries, and he despised them for their sanctimony, and for their assault on the dignity of the Hawaiians.

Dreading the tragedy he would find, he turned to the even more distant past—to the Hawaiians' first contact with the West. He then began to look through the window of contact at the people and events of pre-Western Hawai'i. He memorized the names and genealogies of chiefs and priests, and their ties to migrations, districts of islands, and wars of conquest. He conjured visions of their beings, of their faces, and even of their deaths. Through a process of torment, he became unashamed to be Hawaiian.

*"He Hawai'i Au"*—I first heard those words from John, which I now see on the T-shirts of Hawaiian nationalists. "I am Hawaiian."

John Holt's quest continued over many years, when he could have more easily come to rest, when people from around the country and around the Pacific Ocean approached him in his house on the hillside as a savant. Yet he was never content to be comfortable. He insisted that we free ourselves from the hodgepodge of seeing events in isolation. He posed as an alternative the development of chronologies and the development of cultural context. He believed that when Hawaiians came to be understood within the progression of time, they would be treated as a real people again.

AS WITH THE HAWAIIANS, so it is with Hawai'i's story. Where the American definition of Hawai'i is of a pleasant and quaint place, an exploration of Hawai'i as a suppressed nation is disturbing but epic. Where people in the twentieth century persistently have written little tales of the Islands, the story of Hawai'i as a nation is a turbulent *mo'olelo*.

Those people, John in particular, who went against convention and generated an alternative viewpoint, also generated a new set of possibilities. These new possibilities begin with taking the Hawaiian nation seriously, and they lead to a serious reexamination of America's history in the Pacific.

Tom Coffman

Kāne'ohe, Hawai'i, 1998

## A NOTE ON THE SECOND EDITION

I am as pleased as any writer with a second edition and grateful to my new publisher, Arnold Kotler, for his commitment and interest.

I am compelled to add that the continued relevance of this book reflects a far-reaching political, moral and intellectual failure of the United States to recognize and deal with its takeover of Hawai'i.

In the book's subtitle, the word *Annexation* has been replaced by the word *Occupation*, referring to America's occupation of Hawai'i. Where annexation connotes legality by mutual agreement, the act was not mutual and therefore not legal. Since by definition of international law there was no annexation, we are left then with the word *occupation*.

In making this change, I have embraced the logical conclusion of my research into the events of 1893 to 1898 in Honolulu and Washington, D.C. I am prompted to take this step by a growing body of historical work by a new generation of Native Hawaiian scholars. Dr. Keanu Sai writes, "The challenge for ... the fields of political science, history, and law is to distinguish between the rule of law and the politics of power." In the history of Hawai'i, the might of the United States does not make it right.

In the years between the 1993 Apology Resolution (by the U.S. Congress to the Hawaiian people) and 2000, the Democratic Party fumbled away its opportunity to set in motion a process of negotiation between the United States government and the submerged nation of Hawai'i. Thereafter, the more nakedly imperial Republicans

succeeded in quashing the debate. The administration of a President who led the United States to occupy Iraq also, by some of the same impulses, led the United States away from examining its past as it pertains to the status of Hawai'i.

Dear President Obama of Hawai'i, let us go back and start over. With truth might come some form of reconciliation. And with it, the once bright promise of Hawai'i would be renewed.

Tom Coffman

Hawai'i, 2009

*This book is dedicated to the person who sat up late and took the risks, Lois Lee, a sensational mate and a font of provocative ideas and informed opinions. All of that and laughter too.*

# Nation Within

