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New Bishop Museum Exhibition Tells an Untold Chapter of a Familiar Story

*Kū a Lanakila! Expressions of Sovereignty in Early Territorial Hawai‘i, 1900-1920
shares how Kanaka ‘Ōiwi (Native Hawaiian people) proudly affirmed their continuity
in the face of American imperialism.*

Honolulu, Hawai‘i — [Bishop Museum](#), the State of Hawai‘i Museum of Natural and Cultural History, is opening a new exhibition, *Kū a Lanakila! Expressions of Sovereignty in Early Territorial Hawai‘i, 1900-1920* in the J. M. Long Gallery in Hawaiian Hall.

“It can be said that the discourse around Hawaiian sovereignty has occurred for as long as the Hawaiian islands were ‘discovered’ by visitors from other lands,” said Sarah Kuaiwa, Ph.D., Bishop Museum curator for Hawai‘i and Pacific Resources, and *Kū a Lanakila!* curator. “Many are familiar with the 1893 overthrow of Queen Lili‘uokalani and 1898 annexation of the islands, both viewed as illegal acts, that continue to inspire calls for redress in the present day. Some may not know, however, that during the beginnings of American governance in Hawai‘i, there was a similar movement throughout the islands.”

In the first two decades of Hawai‘i’s territorial period, which spanned 1900-1959, Kanaka ‘Ōiwi (Native Hawaiian people) proudly affirmed their continuity in the face of American imperialism by celebrating aspects of Hawaiian culture through political campaigns, pageantry, competitive sports, and ceremony. *Kū a Lanakila!* highlights the inextricable link between Hawaiian cultural outlets and language with civic and political engagement during this contested period.

“Bishop Museum’s vast collections offer opportunities to tell underrecognized stories about Hawai‘i and its people,” said Kuaiwa. “This exhibition showcases the organizational and cultural efforts spearheaded by Kanaka ‘Ōiwi between 1900-1920, a period characterized by extensive and intentional community organizing across the islands. The objects featured in *Kū a Lanakila!* are physical representations of Kanaka ‘Ōiwi charity, ceremony, competition, and campaigning.”

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The exhibition is framed by two important years, 1900 and 1920.

The Hawaiian Organic Act of 1900 transferred Hawai‘i’s political sovereignty to the United States. Kanaka ‘Ōiwi accounted for two-thirds of the new territory’s eligible voters, enabling them to retain a remarkable amount of influence in local elections. This momentum was used to generate support for Kanaka ‘Ōiwi politicians while also bringing to light social causes affecting Native Hawaiian people.

A culminating moment for Kanaka ‘Ōiwi was the introduction of the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act (HHCA) to the U.S. Congress in 1920, by Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana‘ole. The HHCA, which was signed into legislation by President Harding in 1921, aimed to set aside home lands for Kanaka ‘Ōiwi. The introduction and passage of HHCA is not only one of Kūhiō’s major political achievements, but represents decades of tireless work by the Prince in Washington, D.C. and Kanaka ‘Ōiwi at home to support the lives of Native Hawaiians.

Kū a Lanakila! Expressions of Sovereignty in Early Territorial Hawai‘i, 1900-1920 features objects from Bishop Museum’s Library & Archives and Ethnology collections, including Hui Aloha ‘Āina Banners (banners representing the Hawai‘i, Maui, and Kaua‘i branches of Hui Aloha ‘Āina); ceremonial adornments made and used by ‘Ahahui Ka‘ahumanu (Ka‘ahumanu Society); and political ribbons and ephemera supporting Prince David Kawānanakoa and Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana‘ole.

Perhaps the exhibition’s most notable feature is the 40-foot *A‘a*, Prince Kūhiō’s racing canoe.

Hawai‘i’s monarchs sponsored aquatic sports competitions in the late-19th century, and the spirit of ali‘i’s support for aquatic sports, especially paddling, persisted into the Territory period. Prince David Kawānanakoa and Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana‘ole participated in six-man canoe racing while also running for political office, bridging athletics and politics together.

“Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana‘ole’s koa racing canoe, *A‘a*, was built in 1902 by Henry Weeks and his assistant Antone Grace in Kona,” said Kuaiwa. “It was then brought to Honolulu to compete in six-man canoe races at a time when the sport’s popularity was growing. In its heyday, *A‘a* was paddled and steered by a crew of Kona paddlers. Races won by the Kona crew brought immense pride to Kanaka ‘Ōiwi across the islands.”

After Prince Kūhiō’s passing in January 1922, *A‘a* was gifted to the Bishop Museum in 1923 as part of the Kapi‘olani-Kalaniana‘ole Collection. Bishop Museum currently co-stewards *A‘a* with the Dowsett ‘Ohana, who have generously overseen the physical care and restoration of the canoe since 1952.

The exhibition features a festive landscape painting and diorama to help viewers imagine *A‘a* in O‘ahu’s Honolulu Harbor.

“I am very inspired by the vast collections we have here at Bishop Museum, many of which deserve more attention, recognition, and connection with the communities they represent,” said Kuaiwa. “Many of the pieces in *Kū a Lanakila!* were donated by individuals and families who have entrusted the Museum with these important histories. I find their gifts to the Museum very moving and inspiring and I feel very fortunate to be able to share them through this exhibition.”

“I ka wā mamua, i ka wā mahope. The future is made possible by the past, and I hope visitors can draw inspiration and strength from the pieces and histories in *Kū a Lanakila!*, shared Kuaiwa. “I think there are a lot of parallels between the first two decades of the 20th century and the first two decades of the 21st century.”

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Kū a Lanakila! Expressions of Sovereignty in Early Territorial Hawai'i, 1900-1920 opens in Bishop Museum's J. M. Long Gallery on Saturday, Oct. 5, 2024 and runs through Aug. 10, 2025. The exhibition is curated by Sarah Kuaiwa and designed by Brad Evans, with graphic design work by Susan Yamamoto.

Media Preview Opportunity

Bishop Museum invites members of the news media to a pre-opening, closed-door preview of *Kū a Lanakila! Expressions of Sovereignty in Early Territorial Hawai'i, 1900-1920*, with access to the newly completed exhibition as well as interview opportunities with the exhibition curator and designer.

Kū a Lanakila! Expressions of Sovereignty in Early Territorial Hawai‘i, 1900-1920 Media Preview

- Thursday, Oct. 3, 2024
- 1-4 p.m.
- Bishop Museum J. M. Long Gallery in the Hawaiian Hall Complex

Available for interviews:

- Sarah Kuaiwa, Ph.D., Bishop Museum curator for Hawai'i and Pacific cultural resources, exhibition curator
- Brad Evans, Bishop Museum director of exhibits, exhibition designer

Please RSVP with Lance Aquino via the contact information above.

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About Bishop Museum, the State of Hawai'i Museum of Natural and Cultural History:

Bishop Museum’s mission is to inspire our community and visitors through the exploration, celebration, and perpetuation of the extraordinary history, culture, and environment of Hawai‘i and the Pacific. The Museum was founded in 1889 by Charles Reed Bishop in memory of his wife Bernice Pauahi Bishop, a royal descendant of King Kamehameha I. Today, the Museum thrives as an educational center for the community and is widely regarded as the world’s premier institution for Hawaiian and Pacific content.

Bishop Museum's vast collections of more than 25 million objects and specimens represent nine disciplines and include more than 22 million biological specimens, over 2 million cultural objects, 115,000 historical publications, and 1 million photographs, films, works of art, audio recordings, and manuscripts. These collections tell the stories of the cultures and biodiversity of Hawai'i and the Pacific as well as the proud legacy of scholarly research spanning 130 years.

Bishop Museum proudly serves more than 200,000 visitors each year, including 20,000 children on school visits.

To learn more about the Museum's research, collections, exhibits, and programs, visit [BishopMuseum.org](https://www.bishopmuseum.org), follow @BishopMuseum on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#), become a fan of Bishop Museum on [Facebook](#), visit Bishop Museum's [YouTube](#) channel, or call (808) 847-3511. Bishop Museum is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Bishop Museum is proud to be an Equal Employment Opportunity and Affirmative Action Employer, and

welcomes applicants from the military, veterans, and those with disabilities. Learn about careers at Bishop Museum at [BishopMuseum.org/Careers](https://www.bishopmuseum.org/Careers) and on its [LinkedIn](#) page.

[Bishop Museum Press](#) is Hawai'i's oldest book publisher and one of the first scholarly publishers in the Western Hemisphere, and has published over 1,200 titles and distributed over 1 million books in 72 countries worldwide.

Past news releases can be viewed and downloaded at [BishopMuseum.org/NewsRoom](https://www.bishopmuseum.org/NewsRoom).