Western Progressives, Old South Planters, or Colonial Oppressors: The Enigma of Hawai‘i’s “Big Five,” 1898–1940

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Territorial Hawai‘i was controlled economically, and to an extent, politically, by a group of sugar factors known as the Big Five. Mainland journalists and government officials criticized the influence of the oligarchy and made regional comparisons. This article argues that such criticism reflected West Coast prejudices against Hawai‘i’s Asian labor force as much as specific actions of the Big Five.

The annexation of Hawai‘i in 1898 brought a new and highly complex economic, political, and cultural community into the American nation. On the surface, that community might well have appeared to be an extension of the American West both in 1898 and for the ensuing four decades until the outbreak of World War II. Hawai‘i’s sugar and pineapple economy was tied to California ports. From 1899 to 1940, 85–90 percent of Hawai‘i’s exports were bound for the Golden State. Other factors in the new community also argued for comparisons to the West. The Japanese and Chinese labor force in Hawai‘i found its most logical comparison in the Pacific Coast states. Hawai‘i’s Caucasian population included descendants of American missionaries and merchants who had moved to Hawai‘i—much like those descendants of merchants and missionaries who had populated Oregon and California. The interaction of native Hawaiians with Caucasian settlers also led to analogies with the mainland West’s indigenous people and incoming settlers. Hawai‘i’s territorial government was structured much like other western territories and states, with several strikingly Progressive features. The territory established an income tax in

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1901, supported a public school system, and by 1920 had introduced a commission style of local government for the City and County of Honolulu.1

Despite such western similarities and connections, the newly annexed Hawaiian community rarely elicited western comparisons or analogies. Readers both of territorial histories and of journalistic accounts by visitors from the mainland were more likely to find comparisons to the pre-Civil War plantation South or areas of colonial expansion and exploitation in the Pacific and Caribbean. Terms such as “feudal,” “baronial,” “anti-democratic,” or “outmoded” were oft-repeated adjectives. In some cases, Hawai‘i was presented as a unique society, inscrutable to outside eyes. Just what was it about the peculiar blend of economics, politics, race, and culture in territorial Hawai‘i that sent journalists and historians into such a maelstrom of comparisons and analogies? And is there any way to get a clearer picture of what that last annexed portion of the United States, territorial Hawai‘i, was really like?

To understand the nature of territorial Hawai‘i a chronicler must confront the dominant sugar factors known as the Big Five: Castle & Cooke, Ltd., Alexander & Baldwin, Ltd., C. Brewer and Company, Ltd., Theo H. Davies & Company, Ltd., and American Factors, Ltd. These companies controlled the territory’s economy and were the focus of most commentators’ awe, enmity, or consternation. The power of these companies has led political scientist Noel Kent to describe pre-World War II Hawai‘i simply as “Big Five Territory.”2

The very term “sugar factor” often seems to defy description or comparison. When Fortune magazine surveyed Hawai‘i’s economy and military position in 1940, it was not sure that its mainland audiences could understand the work of these Honolulu-based companies. To unravel the mystery, the magazine tried to compare the companies to better-known norms and explained, “The Big Five are not investment trusts nor an interlocking group of absentee owners in the ‘sixty families of the U. S.’ or the ‘two hundred families of France’ sense of the term.”3

Fortune found it easier to explain what the Big Five were not than what they were. The work of sugar “agents” or “factors” was indeed difficult to unravel. According to an official history of Castle & Cooke, sugar factors “purchased the supplies the plantations needed, recruited labor, and handled the storage, shipping, and marketing of the raw sugar and molasses. They also supplied the required financing. Providing all these services constituted the work of an agency, which was paid a commission for its

1 For California/Hawai‘i trade figures see Andrew W. Lind, An Island Community: Ecological Succession in Hawaii (Chicago, 1938), 19. My knowledge of the Progressive influences in territorial Hawai‘i was aided by a 1991 American Historical Association/Pacific Coast Branch (in Kona, Hawai‘i) conference presentation by Hawai‘i historian Barbara Bennett Peterson, “Historical Perspectives on Urban Policy: Hawaiian Progressivism.” Copy in author’s possession.


3 “Hawaii: Sugar Coated Fort,” Fortune 22 (August 1940), 78.
efforts.” To make matters more complicated, the Big Five, as factors, often used their profits to buy stock in the same plantation and shipping companies for which they were the agents. Thus, the lines between plantation or shipping companies and sugar agencies were often blurred. And, as Fortune pointed out, it was often members of the same families who owned both. Fortune described those families as a strange blend of Yankee stock with overtones of the Old South who managed plantations comparable to those of the Dutch in the East Indies. In the magazine’s opinion, “The whole set-up is an incredible swirl.”

Through the blur and the swirl of economic and family ties what truly attracted the attention of Fortune and most other chroniclers between 1898 and 1940 was the dramatic level of control that these sugar agencies exerted over the economic, political, and social life of Hawai‘i before World War II. By the early 1930s, the Big Five firms controlled 96 percent of Hawai‘i’s sugar crop as well as a substantial portion of the pineapple industry. They dominated shipping to and from the islands through the Matson Line, and they also controlled the major wholesale and retail mercantile functions in the islands. In addition to their dominance of the economic sphere, the Big Five exerted substantial political influence in territorial Hawai‘i through the Republican Party, which dominated the territorial legislature prior to World War II. Many of the appointed territorial governors had a connection to the Big Five firms as officers or investors. To understand the full nature of Big Five control and the regional comparisons that such control elicited, a brief background to the sugar factors’ rise to power before 1898 and in the first decade of territorial life is in order.

Merchandising was the historic root of four of the Big Five companies. With the exception of Alexander & Baldwin, the companies began their commercial existence before the American Civil War as general trading and merchandise firms. There were dozens of merchant firms in pre-1860 Honolulu headed by American, British, German, and Chinese traders. Unlike the chartered monopolies operating with government sanction and protection in North America and the Pacific, such as the British East India Company, the Hudson’s Bay Company or the Russian-American Company, the mercantile firms operating in Hawai‘i were freely competing companies, much like the Yankee merchant firms in the American West that serviced the Santa Fe trade or the Sacramento “Big Four” that supplied miners in the California Gold Rush.


5 Territorial governors directly connected to the Big Five included George Carter (1903–1907), who worked for C. Brewer and Company, and Lawrence Judd (1929–1934), who was employed by Theo H. Davies & Co. Sanford B. Dole (1900–1903) was retained as a lawyer by several Big Five firms after his term in office. Walter Frear (1917–1913) later became president of the Bishop Trust Co., and Charles McCarthy (1918–1921) later worked for the Honolulu Chamber of Commerce.

Compared to their counterparts in the mainland West, possibly the most distinguishing mark of these companies in Hawai‘i was their longevity. While many firms merely lasted as long as an individual merchant remained in Honolulu, a few were carefully transferred to new owners and grew in the scope and size of their operations. The oldest of the Big Five firms, C. Brewer and Company, was founded by Yankee merchant James Hunnewell in 1826 and taken over by Yankee ship captain Charles Brewer in 1843. Celebrating its 170th anniversary in 1996, C. Brewer is the oldest American business firm operating west of the Rocky Mountains.\footnote{For company histories of the merchant firms that became the Big Five, see Scott S. C. Stone, The Story of C. Brewer and Company, Limited (Honolulu, 1991); Taylor, From Land and Sea; Edwin P. Hoyt, Davies: The Inside Story of a British American Family in the Pacific and Its Business Enterprises (Honolulu, 1983); Frederick Simpich, Jr., Dynasty in the Pacific (New York, 1974); Niklaus R. Schweizer, Hawaii and the German Speaking Peoples (Honolulu, 1982). Simpich and Schweizer tell the story of American Factors and its predecessor, H. Hackfeld & Co., Ltd.}

The original Hunnewell firm engaged in the sandalwood trade in the 1820s and from the 1830s to the 1870s provided food and supplies for the Pacific whaling fleet that docked at Lahaina and Honolulu. The pre-Civil War whaling days were the heyday for the growth of merchant firms. German trader Henry Hackfeld arrived in Honolulu in 1849 and established H. Hackfeld and Co., Ltd., the predecessor to American Factors, Ltd. Samuel Castle and Amos Cooke, two American missionaries who had been in Hawai‘i since 1837, started Castle & Cooke in 1851. Theophilus Davies, a young Englishman, arrived in Honolulu in 1857 to work for, and later take over, the firm of R. C. Janion and Co., which had been founded in 1845. From the 1850s onward, these mercantile firms began to invest in sugar plantations and to act as urban agents or factors for the plantations scattered in rural areas throughout Hawai‘i. With the dramatic growth in the number of plantations after the U. S.-Hawai‘i reciprocity treaty of 1875, the sugar factoring business became the primary function of these early merchandising firms. The fifth of the Big Five firms, Alexander and Baldwin, began as one of those post-1875 plantation operations and later became a factoring agency in 1898. Its founders, Henry P. Baldwin and Samuel T. Alexander, were sons of American missionaries who had first arrived in the islands in the early 1830s.

During the tumultuous decade of the 1890s when Queen Lili‘uokalani was overthrown (1893) and the United States annexed Hawai‘i (1898), the political stance of the firms ranged from pro-royalist to revolutionary. In the 1880s, Theophilus Davies, who was well-connected to the monarchy, became the guardian of the Princess Ka‘u‘ulani, heir to the throne of her aunt Lili‘uokalani. In 1889, he brought her to England for schooling as an English gentlewoman. There were rumors at that time that Davies’s son, Clive, would marry Ka‘u‘ulani and thus cement a pro-British union between the monarchy and one of the islands’ largest merchant houses. When Lili‘uokalani was
toppled in 1893, Davies rushed from England to Washington, DC, with Ka'iulani to plea for a royal restoration that would place the princess on the throne.6

At the other end of the spectrum, Castle & Cooke was decidedly pro-revolutionary. Samuel Castle, who died in 1894, advocated annexation as early as the 1850s. One of his sons, William R. Castle, was on the Committee of Public Safety, which staged the revolution. Occupying the middle of the spectrum were the different officers of C. Brewer and Company. Prior to the revolution, partners and investors in the company had been closely tied to the monarchy. C. Brewer’s banker, Charles R. Bishop, married Princess Bernice Pauahi. Lili’uokalani’s husband, John O. Dominis, had worked for the firm as a bookkeeper. Members of the firm held positions in the cabinets of King David Kalakaua and Lili’uokalani and took varying stands on the revolution and annexation. At the outbreak of the revolution C. Brewer’s president, J. O. Carter, was pro-monarchy. Other members of the firm ousted Carter in 1894 and installed the pro-revolutionary P. C. Jones as president. Carter, however, remained loyal to Lili’uokalani and became the ousted queen’s financial adviser.9

After the revolution and annexation, the pro-revolutionary, Honolulu-resident factors clearly took the lead in consolidating their power within the circle of factoring firms. Their first move was to eliminate the California dominance of San Francisco sugar magnate Claus Spreckels. Spreckels, who had become the leading West Coast sugar refiner by the 1860s, came to Hawai‘i in 1875, and soon became the single largest planter in the islands. He joined forces with British-born merchant William G. Irwin in the sugar agency of W. G. Irwin & Co. By 1891, Irwin and Spreckels controlled one-third of the Hawaiian sugar crop, as well as the Oceanic Steamship Co., which transported most of the crop to Spreckels’s Western Sugar Refinery in San Francisco. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, the Honolulu-based factors argued constantly with Spreckels over the grade of their sugar and the price paid them at his mainland refinery.10

In a number of adroit moves after 1898, James B. Castle, another son of Samuel Castle and a director of Castle & Cooke, exploited an intra-family struggle between

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6 For the connection of Davies to the Princess Ka’iulani see Hoyt, Davies, 159-66. Ka’iulani was the daughter of English merchant Archibald Cleghorn and Miriam Likelike, sister to Kalakaua and Lili’uokalani. Davies and several other Honolulu merchants wanted to place Ka’iulani on the throne rather than restore Lili’uokalani after the revolution. They concluded that Lili’uokalani had alienated too many people.

9 In addition to J. O. Carter and P. C. Jones, other partners in C. Brewer had a long connection with the monarchy. H. A. Peirce (1808–1885) was Hawaiian ambassador to the United States and minister of foreign affairs under King Kalakaua. Henry A. P. Carter (1837–91) was Hawaiian ambassador to the United States. P. C. Jones, who supported the revolution, had been Lili’uokalani’s minister of finance.

10 For the best background on the activities of Claus Spreckels and William Irwin, see Jacob Adler, Claus Spreckels The Sugar King in Hawaii (Honolulu, 1966). For the long-standing argument between Spreckels and Theo Davies over the price paid at the San Francisco refinery, see Hoyt, Davies, 91–104.
Spreckels and his sons to buy out Spreckels's plantation company in Hawai‘i. Castle was aided in this transaction by Alexander & Baldwin and subsequently became a partner of this newly emerged factoring firm. To break Spreckels's control over refining, in 1905 a coalition of planters and factors bought a cooperative refinery at Crockett, California, north of San Francisco. It was to this refinery that they directed the output of their plantations. They named their new venture the California and Hawaiian Sugar Refining Co. In 1908, Claus Spreckels died. The next year C. Brewer and Company approached William Irwin and purchased his factoring firm, which included the agency, for a number of plantations as well as for the Oceanic Steamship Co. Spreckels's old partner soon returned to San Francisco. By 1910, the California dominance of Claus Spreckels and William G. Irwin in Hawai‘i had come to an end. In the process, the Hawaiian sugar industry shifted from the control of Californians, who had owned three-fifths of the stock in Hawaiian plantations prior to 1898, to local ownership. The combination of local ownership and a reinvestment of profits into Hawai‘i thus became one of the defining marks of that new territorial community. Most observers and commentators on the new territory would find such resident control particularly noteworthy.11

Just as the Big Five overthrew California ownership of the Hawaiian sugar industry, the first major commentator on territorial Hawai‘i arrived in Honolulu—the widely read mainland Progressive journalist Ray Stannard Baker. Baker's description of territorial Hawai‘i set the tone for future observers and in contorted ways banished Hawai‘i from the West and twentieth century Progressivism—he placed the islands in a feudal world of their own.

By the time he visited Hawai‘i in 1911, Baker had not only identified himself with the cause of political Progressivism, particularly the "insurgency" of Wisconsin's U. S. Senator Robert M. LaFollette, but had also become well steeped in American regionalism. He was a product of Frederick Jackson Turner's late-nineteenth-century Midwest. Born in Lansing, Michigan, in 1870, he grew up in the frontier logging region of northwest Wisconsin's St. Croix River Valley. His early adult life was spent as a journalist in Chicago, but by 1910, the lure of his New England ancestry drew him and his wife to live near Amherst, Massachusetts. To this New England and midwestern heritage, he also added a scholarly knowledge of the American South. In 1908 he published a classic study of the American Negro, Following the Color Line (New York). With this varied experience of regional and political norms, Baker had a basis upon which to judge the island territory, and he wrote a set of three articles for the American Magazine in 1911–1912.12


12 For background on Baker and his trip to Hawai‘i, see Ray Stannard Baker, American Chronicle: The Autobiography of Ray Stannard Baker (New York, 1945), 293–4, and John E.
The specific call that sent him to Hawai‘i came from a friend in the West—William Kent, a Progressive Republican elected to Congress from Marin County, California, in 1910. Kent suggested that Baker go to Hawai‘i, where he would see the “growth of cold selfish commercialism.” Exactly why Kent was so concerned with Hawai‘i is unclear. He had visited the islands in 1907, and the Big Five’s Crockett, California, refinery was near his Marin County congressional district. Kent was also a close ally of San Francisco reformer Rudolph Spreckels, a son of Claus Spreckels. Thus, it is likely that he was familiar with the western sugar industry in both its California and Hawaiian phases. Whatever Kent’s concerns, Baker found his call a welcome winter respite from New England and departed for the islands in February 1911.13

Baker arrived at a particularly auspicious time: the Big Five had only recently consolidated their hold on the sugar industry. U. S. Commissioner of Labor, whom Baker cited, noted in a 1911 report: “The past five years have witnessed an increasing centralization of this (the sugar) industry; large plantations have been combined into still larger plantations; sugar-factor firms, which represent the center of financial control, are fewer but stronger than in 1905; . . . and steamship lines to the mainland are more closely allied than ever with sugar factors and planters.”14

The Big Five’s consolidation initially appealed to Baker’s Progressive instincts for efficiency and for local, rather than absentee, control. He was impressed with the high level of scientific management in the Hawaiian sugar industry, which he called “farming with brains” and “almost unbelievable to a person accustomed to ordinary farming methods of the middle West.” Baker applauded the Big Five for throwing off the control of the California “sugar trust” that was “robbing them.” For Baker the Big Five had shown “unusual ability in overcoming the disadvantages of distance and the rigors of world competition.” Such ability had the beneficent result that profits from the sugar industry returned to Hawai‘i, though Baker noted that those profits still resulted from a tariff protection against foreign sugar that no true Progressive could condone.15

Having linked Hawai‘i to the California sugar industry and praised its modern farming methods, Baker might have gone on to describe the islands as one of the most efficient parts of the American West. But other aspects of island life forced him to withhold any “western” label and to reach for other regional comparisons. In Baker’s eyes the power of the Big Five was based on a land and labor system that was not


15 Baker, “How King Sugar Rules,” 30–2. Hawaiian sugar was protected by the same tariff provisions as mainland sugar. A major political quest of the islands’ sugar planters was to maintain the classification of Hawaiian sugar as domestic rather than foreign.
democratic and hence not like a western-style homesteading democracy to which he constantly alluded.

The mainland journalist explained that three-fourths of the population had no say in the government because the Chinese and Japanese labor force was disenfranchised. Baker did not blame the voteless status of the Asians on the Big Five. The prohibition of naturalization for Asian immigrants emanated from national policy endorsed by most western Progressives, including Baker and William Kent. Baker fully condoned the restrictions on Chinese and Japanese entry to the U.S. that had been demanded by what he called the "democracy of the Pacific Coast": white working men. For the journalist, the Big Five's anti-democratic act was in bringing voteless Asians to work in Hawai'i, thus preventing mainland Caucasian workers from migrating to the islands. Baker even went so far as to blame the Big Five for forcing mainland taxpayers to support costly defense fortifications in Hawai'i, necessitated by the international tensions that immigration restriction caused between the U.S. and China/Japan.16

The Progressive journalist despised "cheap" Asian labor, which he claimed made "democratic citizenship impossible." This "peasant" labor force precluded Hawai'i from being part of a homesteading democracy and prompted Baker's continual comparisons to the American South, particularly the South before the Civil War. "The white laboring class of citizens," he explained, "disappears before the Oriental influx in Hawaii just as poor whites before the war fled from the Negro." For Baker, a western-style democracy—before and after the war—was characterized by free, landowning, voting, white farmers.17

Baker's analysis of the lack of democracy in Hawai'i and the Big Five's culpability had even more twists and turns. The disenfranchisement of the Asians did not result in a Caucasian majority in the electorate of the territory. Caucasians comprised only

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In arriving at his three-fourths voteless estimate Baker noted that one-half of Hawai'i's population was Chinese and Japanese with the other one-quarter being composed of "peasant" Europeans (Portuguese, Spanish, Russian) who were not yet naturalized.

Immigrant Asians were excluded from naturalization by a federal law dating to the 1790s. Chinese Exclusion Acts, based on West Coast demands, had been passed in 1882, 1892, and 1902. Restriction on Japanese entry to the United States was reached in Theodore Roosevelt's 1907–1908 series of notes to the Japanese emperor known as the Gentlemen's Agreement, which restricted the immigration of male workers, but not females. For the best background on anti-Chinese and anti-Japanese restrictions based on West Coast demands, see Roger Daniels, Asian America: Chinese and Japanese in the United States since 1850 (Seattle, 1988).

17 Baker, "How King Sugar Rules," 36. Baker did not define the "West" or use the term in the way he used "Old South" or New England. However, his constant reference to an ideal model of a homesteading democracy of white citizen settlers strikes me, and I would imagine most readers, as having a regional home in the American Midwest. Thus, I have characterized Baker's "homesteading democracy" as a western or western-style ideal.
about four thousand of the islands' 14,442 registered voters in 1910. The vast majority, some ten thousand, were native Hawaiians, who participated actively in politics. But according to Baker, they were controlled by the whites who "flattered" them with luaus, divided them into three political parties, and created public jobs for them. He was equally critical of the Hawaiians for allowing themselves to be controlled. (Baker leaves the reader to ponder if Hawaiian voters, free from Big Five influence, would somehow have proposed and voted for land and labor policies that would have encouraged more whites to migrate from the mainland.) He also rebuked the Hawaiians because they were not small landholding farmers. Instead, those who owned land tended to rent plots to hardworking Asians who had left the sugar plantations. Caucasian planters, Hawaiian rentiers, and Asian workers had one thing in common: they did not work the land they owned, the precondition in Baker's mind for a true western democracy. Instead, life in Hawai'i was "very much as it was in the South before the war."18

Baker believed that white farmers were eager to migrate to Hawai'i and realize his dream of a homesteading democracy. He devoted great attention and sympathy to a group of 20 homesteaders led by J. E. Gamalielson, a Swedish-American farmer who came to Hawai'i in the 1890s to grow sugar cane on a small landholding. Having built a cooperative sugar mill themselves, the farmers were subsequently "flattered" by the owners of a large plantation when they offered use of the plantation mill. Later the plantation failed to give the homesteaders what they thought their sugar was worth; bankruptcy was the end result. By 1910, only three of the 20 homesteaders were still farming. Six or seven sold out to the plantation, and the rest rented their land to Japanese workers who were able to make money by raising cane and selling it to the plantation. At every turn a combination of white planters and Asian workers thwarted the dream of the white homesteaders! A democratic Hawai'i could result only from increased homesteading legislation that favored the citizen settler. Baker praised territorial governor Walter Frear for proposing such laws to the U. S. Congress.19

18 Baker, "How King Sugar Rules," 32-4; Ray Stannard Baker, "Wonderful Hawaii—A World Experiment Station, II. The Land and the Landless," American Magazine 73 (December 1911), 204-6. Hawaiians belonged to the Republican and Democratic parties as well as to a third party known as the Home Rule Party. Though the Republican Party held a majority in the territorial legislature prior to World War II, Hawai'i was not a one-party territory. The Democratic Party, though plagued with intra-party factionalism, did elect delegates to the legislature as well as territorial delegates to Congress. Voter participation was high, with 83-90 percent of registered voters actually voting in the 1930s.

19 Baker, "The Land and the Landless," 206-9, 214. Though Baker was most interested in the Swedish-American farmer, two-thirds of the 20 homesteaders were Portuguese, the class Baker had earlier called "peasants." In addition to the prices paid at the plantation mill, Baker also criticized the Big Five's relation to small farmers for the classically anti-Progressive measures of high charges for the sea and land transport within Hawai'i and for withholding use of private wharfage facilities.
Though the Big Five foiled the dreams of white homesteaders, Baker was nonetheless attracted by the level of community philanthropy practiced by members of the Caucasian elite. The Big Five’s reinvestment of profits extended from their businesses to the community. Some of the rich, he noted, gave 40–60 percent of their income to charity with the result that “[c]olleges, kindergartens, churches, missions and social settlements flourish there with unexampled vigor.” The YMCA was able to raise $143,000 in six days. Trying to reconcile the dichotomies of island life, Baker concluded, “I have rarely visited any place where there was as much charity and as little democracy as in Hawaii.” Though subsequent writers quoted this line as if it had been a criticism of planter paternalism, Baker genuinely applauded the charity. To his Progressive mind this showed an admirable concern for the welfare of the population that was often lacking among business interests on the mainland. Baker might well have found Hawai’i a true western paradise had the level of democracy matched the level of charity.20

Baker’s positive feeling toward such “good works” led him to divide the planter/business elite into two groups: 1) those who focused solely on profits and showed little interest in a wider democracy and 2) those who were in favor of more democracy (including more white farmers), more educational facilities, and a more inclusive franchise, including local-born Asians who would become voters in the next decades. Into the former group Baker placed some of the planters whom the Big Five had recently displaced—and who had returned to England, Germany, and San Francisco. In the latter group Baker put those of “missionary descent” who were born in the islands and “raised in modest homes.” To Baker they had “become aristocrats not with entire comfort” who still retained an old democratic “New England conscience.” Despite all of his regional comparisons to the South, Baker still found in Hawai’i the New England he revered.21

In his third and final article, published in January 1912, Baker once again voiced his criticism of “Oriental” labor and his lament for the plight of the free white worker. But in the final pages of the piece, he seemed to succumb to the lure of the islands and the Progressive benevolence of the white business elite. Though he found the current condition of the public schools “overcrowded,” he noted that “these abuses are already being recognized by the progressive and far-sighted people of the islands.” He praised local efforts at multiracial education, and pointed to the public Kaiulani School in Honolulu as well as acknowledging private schools such as Oahu College (Punahou School) and Mid-Pacific Institute, run by Francis W. Damon, the brother of Hawai’i’s leading banker.22

21 Baker, “The Land and the Landless,” 211–2, 214. Baker’s reference to the profit-oriented planters who had recently departed probably refers to 1) Wm. G. Irwin, who had returned to San Francisco in 1910, 2) Clive Davies, the son of Theo Davies, who returned to England in 1910, and 3) officers of H. Hackfeld and Co. who returned to Germany.
Baker’s fascination with island life even prompted him to foresee the outlines of democracy in the island’s Asian population. At the end of his last article he focused on the Japanese immigrants, who he now described as “so irresistibly industrious and progressive.” He noted their control of fishing and vegetable raising and praised the fact that many were “becoming merchants, bankers and professional men.” He cited the substantial growth in Japanese property ownership as a positive sign and looked forward to the day when the Nisei (Hawai‘i-born second generation) would come of voting age. The journalist’s sudden democratic vision for the islands did not sit well with his mainland Progressive audience, most of whom saw no chance for Asian assimilation or Americanization. One of his most avid readers, Theodore Roosevelt, wrote him that Oriental exclusion should continue to be the major national policy. Roosevelt was no stranger to conditions in Hawai‘i. By executive order he prohibited the immigration of Japanese workers from Hawai‘i to the mainland a year before he negotiated the restrictive Gentlemen’s Agreement with the emperor of Japan.23

Baker must have kept his new vision of Hawai‘i to himself. There is no indication that he turned his attention back to the islands once he returned to the mainland or that he challenged the assumptions of his Progressive colleagues. Despite Baker’s fleeting presence in Hawai‘i, his articles are nonetheless valuable period pieces in understanding the Big Five and the difficulty of making regional comparisons for Hawai‘i.

Baker came to the islands just at the time that the Big Five had consolidated their power, and at a time when mainland Americans were particularly curious about the potential development of the newly annexed territory. Baker’s dream to turn Hawai‘i into a mid-Pacific Minnesota or Wisconsin with homesteading legislation that would encourage the migration of Swedish-American farmers now seems quaint and, at best, occupies a footnote position in the historiography of the islands. Baker seemed to miss the potential federal land legislation that was of most concern to voting islanders in 1911—land for native Hawaiians. This was the major mission of territorial delegate Jonah Kuhio, who eventually secured passage of the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920. Land for Hawaiians, rather than homesteads for mainlanders, has remained a central issue in the history of Hawai‘i to the present day.

If Baker missed or ignored some of the crucial lines of Hawai‘i’s future development, he was correct on others. He aptly noted the “lack of democracy” as the defining characterization of public life in territorial Hawai‘i, and as the element that made the Big Five “feudal” and “aristocratic.” Baker then used “democracy” as the defining characteristic of the homesteading ideal and as the ultimate criterion for excluding Hawai‘i from the western region that spawned such an ideal. By banishing Hawai‘i from the democratic West in 1911 and seeking southern comparisons, Baker set a pattern that would continue well beyond World War II. Even in the 1990s, mainland historians, including Roger Daniels, who has written extensively about Asian-Americans on the

West Coast, continue to seek southern, rather than western, comparisons to analyze racial issues in Hawai‘i.24

In this maze of regional comparisons, Baker and his successors seemed to miss the irony that the lack of democracy in Hawai‘i was itself a western creation. The Big Five were not local elites who denied Asians a political privilege practiced in the western states or guaranteed by the Constitution—as was the case with southern segregationists. The federal policies of Asian exclusion and disenfranchisement fomented by West Coast Progressives gave Hawai‘i its “undemocratic” status. Baker excluded the Big Five from the ranks of western Progressives not because they denied democracy to Asians, but because they encouraged Asians to work in Hawai‘i and hence flaunted western demands for Asian exclusion.

If the Big Five did not technically disenfranchise the Asians, was the resulting political system nonetheless one they desired and from which they profited? Baker was among the few to note that the Caucasian elite were not monolithic in thought—except in support for the federal tariff on foreign sugar. He found various views among the elite on the political future of the islands and on the participation of Asian-Americans in politics. But how would those varying views among the Caucasian elite play out in the future, particularly given the attitude of West Coast Progressives against any participation by Asians or Asian-Americans in American political life? Baker left that issue to the reader’s imagination.25

These perplexing questions on the level of democracy that the Big Five wanted or to which they would agree reached a new level in the years 1935 to 1940 over the issue of statehood for the islands. As the question of statehood coincided with the approaching war clouds over Asia, observers flocked to Hawai‘i once again to comment on the political structure of the islands and the power of the Big Five. As in years past, mainland attitudes toward Hawai‘i’s Asian and Asian-American population, as well as the Big Five’s attitude toward that population, shaped the framework of observation. Mainland concerns now centered on fears over the loyalty of Hawai‘i’s Japanese and Japanese-American population. The issue of exclusion had been settled in 1924, with federal legislation ending the immigration of all Chinese and Japanese workers to the U. S.

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24 For example, immigration scholar Roger Daniels invoked a southern comparison for Hawai‘i’s English Standard Schools as another example of a system of racial segregation in his foreword to Eileen Tamura, Americanization, Acculturation and Ethnic Identity: The Nisei Generation in Hawaii (Urbana, 1994), xi–xii.

25 Past actions of the Caucasian elite also give no firm clue to their stance on democracy. In the days of the Hawaiian Kingdom, the missionary ancestors of the Big Five advocated an increased democracy for Hawaiians and at times opposed Hawaiian nobles who would limit the franchise. But in the 1880s and 1890s, Caucasian revolutionists sought to restrict the franchise to property owners. After the revolution, the Caucasian leaders of the Republic restricted the franchise to exclude Asians as well as most Hawaiians. However, upon annexation the U. S. Government demanded the franchise for Hawaiians, a condition Caucasian political leaders accepted.
The Hawai‘i that the new observers found had changed since Baker’s day, though much had remained the same. Sugar was still king in the islands, but with the blossoming of James Dole’s canning industry in the years immediately following Baker’s visit, pineapple now played an important role. The Hawai‘i-resident factors in the Big Five further increased their power and control when the U. S. entered World War I. In 1917, the German-owned H. Hackfeld & Co. was still the largest sugar agency in the islands. Anti-German feeling reached a peak that summer when the firm’s local manager, George Rodiek, was rumored to be involved in treasonous acts against the Allies. In late 1917, the company was taken into custody by the United States as alien property; its stock was put up for sale. A coalition of local investors—including members of other Big Five firms—purchased the shares under the name American Factors, Ltd. in the summer of 1918.26

The efficiency of the sugar factors made it possible for Hawai‘i to remain relatively unaffected by the fluctuations of world agricultural prices in the early 1930s. The stability of the Big Five’s sugar empire also enabled the companies to expand their influence over the pineapple trade. The Hawaiian pineapple industry, unlike sugar, experienced serious disruption during the early 1930s. Castle & Cooke took control of James Dole’s Hawaiian Pineapple Co. in 1933 and thus acquired a majority control, though not a monopoly, of the whole industry.27

The power of the Big Five in controlling the sugar and pineapple industries also extended to what many have later considered an overbearing control of labor relations. During the bitter plantation strike of 1920, the Big Five, represented by the Hawaiian Sugar Planters’ Association (HSPA), refused to negotiate with the two unions representing plantation workers: the Japanese Federation of Labor and the Filipino Labor Union of Hawaii. The HSPA steadfastly held to this despite the concerned pleas to negotiate voiced by some members of the Caucasian elite, including Albert W. Palmer, pastor of the Central Union Church. The rhetoric on the part of management and the “establishment” newspapers carried an anti-Japanese theme that would be remembered for decades to come. “No concessions whatsoever” was management’s position to union demands. To many plantation workers, this became the Big Five’s bitter legacy, even though the HSPA met most of the economic requests of the workers once the strike was over. The recognition of collective bargaining by agricultural

26 For the rise of James Dole’s pineapple industry see Richard Dole and Elizabeth Dole Porteus, The Story of James Dole (Honolulu, 1990). For the takeover of H. Hackfeld & Co., see Edward Joesting, Hawaii: An Uncommon History (New York, 1972), 264–9; Fuchs, Hawaii Pono, 243–4; Schweizer, Hawaii and the German Speaking Peoples, 103–6. The takeover was not friendly. After World War I, German stockholders sued unsuccessfully for the return of their property.

27 For the Castle & Cooke takeover of Dole’s Hawaiian Pineapple Co. from the Castle & Cooke perspective, see Taylor, From Land and Sea, 161–71; for the perspective of Dole’s daughter and nephew, see Dole and Porteus, The Story of James Dole, 97–9. Castle & Cooke controlled 51 percent of the pineapple industry, with the remaining 49 percent in the hands of two mainland companies, Libby McNeil & Libby, and California Packing Corp.
workers would have been virtually unprecedented anywhere in the U. S. in 1920. It might even have drawn the wrath of West Coast labor unions, who restricted or opposed Asian participation in any form of organized labor. Nonetheless, the stand of the HSPA on union participation in 1920 signified to many islanders that the Big Five wanted to restrict unenfranchised Asians from any participation in the public life of the territory.28

The memory of the 1920 strike was still vivid in the mid-1930s, though the make-up of the plantation work force had changed substantially over the ensuing one and one-half decades. Many Japanese and Japanese-American workers responded to the strike by leaving the plantations and moving into non-plantation work in urban and rural areas. In Baker's day, the Japanese comprised 55 percent of the work force. By 1932, this number had dropped to 18 percent. Filipinos, who composed 13 percent of the labor force in 1912, dominated the plantations in 1932, when they made up almost 70 percent of the sugar plantation labor force. Chinese workers, who were still 5 percent of the plantation work force in 1912, were virtually non-existent in the fields by 1932.29

By the 1930s, the rapid turnover of labor, which had long been a feature of plantation life in Hawai'i, had the effect of making agricultural wages in Hawai'i the highest in the nation. As work on sugar plantations was year-round rather than seasonal, the annual earnings of sugar workers in Hawai'i were substantially greater than those of seasonal farm workers on the mainland. As late as 1929, the annual turnover-rate among plantation workers was still 31–33 percent. Labor shortages coupled with a high level of productivity and mechanization led to the higher wage structure.30

With the passage of time, the dynamics of democracy began to change. More and more Hawai'i-born Japanese and Chinese children reached voting age. In Baker's day, there were virtually no Asians voting; during the 1930s, 9 percent of the Chinese-Americans were casting votes. By 1936, the Japanese-American percentage of the electorate soared to 25 percent—up from 13 percent in 1930. Two Chinese-


29 For the percentages of Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino labor on the plantations, see Okihiro, Cane Fires, 55, 59, and Clarence E. Glick, Sojourners and Settlers: Chinese Migrants in Hawaii (Honolulu, 1980), 66. The percentage of Filipino workers dropped after 1934 with the passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934, which severely curtailed Filipino immigration in exchange for a promise of eventual Philippine independence.

30 For a discussion of wage rates on Hawaiian plantations, see Thomas Kemper Hitch, Islands in Transition: The Past, Present, and Future of Hawaii's Economy (Honolulu, 1992), 86–7. It should be noted that high agricultural wage rates were never comparable to mainland industrial wage rates. For an analysis of worker turnover in the late 1920s, see Lind, An Island Community, 202.
Americans and two Japanese-Americans held seats in the territorial legislature by 1936. The number was small compared to the percentage of Asian-Americans who were registered voters, but unprecedented by West Coast standards, where no Asian-Americans served in state legislatures. Political participation on Big Five plantations, which had not been an issue in 1912 because so few workers were enfranchised, became a major concern in territorial politics by the mid-1930s. Where did the Big Five stand on voting by plantation workers and on the bigger issue of whether Hawai‘i should seek statehood? Such was the state of economic and political affairs in the islands when two visiting committees of the U. S. Congress came to investigate Hawai‘i’s readiness for statehood in 1935 and 1937.31

The arrival of the congressional committees in Honolulu signified what seemed to be a radical change in the stance of the Caucasian business community toward statehood. Prior to 1935, the Big Five had shown little interest in statehood. Nearly all commentators, both critics and official company histories, agree that the Big Five were not unhappy with territorial rule, given their ability to influence the appointment of the territorial governor and their ability to gain reasonable treatment of the sugar industry in the U. S. Congress. The increased level of democracy that would come with full home rule and an elected governor might complicate their established level of control. In 1934, Congress passed the Jones-Costigan Sugar Act, which established quotas for the entry of Hawaiian sugar into the U. S. and basically treated the Hawaiian product as foreign sugar. The sugar factors changed their position on statehood virtually overnight. Discriminatory treatment by Congress, which could not take place if Hawai‘i became a state, was much more feared than any increased level of home rule. With the support of the HSPA, the territory’s newly elected delegate to Congress, Republican Samuel Wilder King, introduced statehood legislation in early 1935.32

Was the new position on statehood and its ramifications for democracy widely shared by members of the Big Five? In both the 1935 and 1937 hearings it was difficult to determine an official Big Five position on statehood. There was never a person who identified himself as the spokesman for the Big Five. The closest was Charles Hemenway, vice-president of Alexander & Baldwin and chairman of the Board of Regents of the University of Hawai‘i. At the 1935 hearings Hemenway spoke in favor of statehood, but was quick to note that this was his personal opinion. He indicated that “a great many others in the sugar industry” agreed, though their acceptance of statehood had been recent, due largely to the Jones-Costigan Act. Hemenway also affirmed the


32 For a general background on the Big Five position on statehood prior to 1934–35 and the effect of the Jones-Costigan Act, see Roger Bell, Last Among Equals: Hawaiian Statehood and American Politics (Honolulu, 1984), 60–2.
loyalty of Hawai‘i’s Japanese American population. On this score he was emphatic, noting his long association with young people of all races at the University of Hawai‘i: “As a result of my contact with these young people I have complete confidence in their sincerity, integrity, and loyalty to the country of their birth. I therefore feel that the grant of statehood to Hawaii will not in any way prejudice the national interest but on the contrary will increase the loyalty of its citizens because of such an expression of confidence.”

Hemenway was a substantial, though only a first generation, figure in the Caucasian business community. A Vermont native and Yale graduate, he came to Hawai‘i in 1899 to teach math at the Punahou School. He soon became a lawyer and then territorial attorney general before joining the Big Five in 1915. In many ways, he fit the pattern of the democratic “aristocrat not with entire comfort” whom Baker praised in 1911. His testimony may have indicated that the Big Five looked forward to, or at least accepted, a multi-racial democracy in the islands. But was the democratic Hemenway typical of the “others in the sugar industry,” whom he mentioned but did not name?

Other witnesses at the 1935 and 1937 hearings agreed that the Big Five favored statehood, but for reasons that thwarted rather than advanced democracy. They testified against the Big Five and against statehood. According to these witnesses statehood would give the Big Five even greater political control of the islands than they possessed under territorial rule—exactly the opposite of the Big Five’s own pre-1935 reasoning. Typical was the extensive 1937 testimony of Presbyterian minister Henry Rudin, who had worked 16 years as a welfare and personnel director for Waialua plantation, one of the largest plantations in Hawai‘i, run by Castle & Cooke, before running unsuccessfully as a Democratic candidate for the territorial Senate in 1936.

Rudin told the committee he opposed statehood because of the “unhealthy control” of the Big Five. He explained that the Big Five operated a system of spying, coercion, and intimidation to force workers to vote for Republican candidates and to advocate statehood. Democratic candidates, he claimed, were not allowed to campaign on certain plantations. However, when members of the committee asked Rudin to cite specific names of people who had intimidated employees, his answers were vague. When asked if the manager of Waialua plantation had threatened or intimidated him, Rudin responded, “He would not intimidate me. John Midkiff is more broadminded than most managers.” Rudin also admitted that plantation manager Midkiff allowed Democratic candidates to appear at Waialua, but that managers on other plantations were not so “broad.” Though Rudin may well have expected the Democratic congressmen to be sympathetic to him, they instead responded that the


34 For biographical background on Hemenway, see Ted T. Tsukiyama, Charles Reed Hemenway, 1875–1947 (Honolulu, 1995), pamphlet in Special Collections, Hamilton Library, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.
election of a Democratic territorial delegate to Congress in 1922, 1924, and 1932 undermined his assertions that Democrats could not get elected and that the Big Five controlled island politics.  

Rudin's antipathy to the Big Five led him to advocate a non-elected commission government for Hawai‘i or the appointment of a territorial governor with broad powers who was not connected to the Big Five. In this vein, he appealed for support from one of the Democratic members of the committee, Representative John Rankin of Mississippi. In 1933, Rankin proposed such legislation for Hawai‘i after the sensational Massie Case, an affair that centered on the alleged rape of Thalia Massie, the Caucasian wife of a naval lieutenant, by a racially mixed group of “local boys.” Rankin concluded that white women were no longer safe under the current territorial government and proposed the appointment of a strong mainland governor who would not be susceptible to island pressure and could rein in the “locals.”

But Rudin sounded the wrong chord, even with Rankin, when he criticized working conditions on the sugar plantations. He told the committee that he left Waialua plantation because he “refused to continue in the policy of deceiving people, through paternalism, and not giving workers the basic elements of industrial service, for instance decent wages, decent hours of work, and at the end of their working life a living pension.” However, under further questioning Rudin agreed that wage levels were higher than for mainland farm workers, particularly when the perquisites of housing, medical care, hospitalization, and in some cases pensions were included. Rankin reminded Rudin that very few American farmers—independent or wage earning—had pensions and retorted that the high wages in Hawai‘i raised the price of sugar to the struggling independent farmer on the mainland. After examining Rudin, the southern congressman showed little interest in the Big Five and in subsequent days at the hearing turned his attention to the problems he saw emanating from Hawai‘i’s Japanese population.

At the conclusion of the 1937 hearing, the committee turned its attention to the observations of Hawai‘i’s Republican delegate to Congress, Samuel Wilder King, who gave his own interpretation of the islands’ political economy. According to King, claims of Big Five control were “exaggerated beyond any measure.” He pointed out that all of

35 Statehood for Hawaii, 1938, 71, 75, 81, 87. The Democrats who served as territorial delegates to Congress were William P. Jarrett (1923–27) and Lincoln McCandless (1933–35).

36 For the extensive literature on the Massie Case and the political repercussions that followed, see Theon Wright, Rape in Paradise (New York, 1966); Peter Van Slingerland, Something Terrible Has Happened (New York, 1966); B. Thomas Packer, Massie Case (New York, 1966). A good chapter-length treatment appears in Daws, Shoal of Time, 317–27. For Territorial Governor Lawrence Judd’s account, see Lawrence M. Judd, Lawrence M. Judd and Hawaii (Rutland, VT, 1971), 166–204.

The Rankin Bill, which was also endorsed by Franklin Roosevelt, passed the House of Representatives in 1933, but was opposed in the Senate. FDR withdrew it from further consideration.

the companies had begun as the efforts of pioneer merchants and that most of the developments in Hawai‘i were locally financed and sponsored. King claimed that the distribution of wealth in Hawai‘i was broad and that the most noteworthy aspect of Hawai‘i’s economy was the high degree of local ownership. Echoing Baker’s observation of a quarter century earlier, he did note that Hawai‘i was characterized by few “small enterprises” or homesteading activities. The size of Hawai‘i’s companies, however, had not thwarted the development of good government in the delegate’s eyes. He pointed with pride to the territory’s “progressive” government and its fine public schools. King proposed that Congress authorize a plebiscite on statehood to test the readiness of the people for statehood and their ability to participate in democratic government.38

For the most part, the position of Hemenway and King set the political agenda for the immediate future. The statehood plebiscite was held in 1940 with a 2–1 vote in favor of statehood. But Rudin’s testimony, despite its vagueness, exaggerated rhetoric, and even misguided appeals to Representative Rankin, signified a view of the Big Five that caught the attention of other observers in the late 1930s. Positions on the power of the Big Five, varying from those of King to Rudin, were sounded by other government observers who came in the late 1930s to assess the status of labor unions in Hawai‘i.

Beginning in 1901, the U. S. Bureau of Labor, and its successor agencies, had made regular reports on the territory of Hawai‘i, generally assessing the condition and structure of the sugar and pineapple industries and their work forces. By 1937, collective bargaining for industrial workers, though not for agricultural workers, was protected by the Wagner Act and had withstood challenge in the U. S. Supreme Court. The 1939 report, the first since 1930, not only detailed the structure of industry in Hawai‘i, but looked closely at labor relations and the condition of unions. The report, authored by federal research economist James Shoemaker, was in many ways a 25 year retrospective look at the maturing of the Big Five-dominated sugar world that Ray Stannard Baker left in 1912.39

Like Baker, Shoemaker emphasized the efficiency of the sugar industry, both its scientific technology and the highly coordinated management structure that emanated from the Big Five and the HSPA. Such efficiency had brought economic

38 Ibid., 575–80. King was a member of an old Hawaiian-Caucasian family. Both his father and grandfather were prominent in the inter-island shipping business. King had a real-estate business in Honolulu and told the committee that he was not connected to any Big Five firm. Even before his election to Congress in 1934, King had organized a local group to lobby Congress against the Rankin Bill. King later served in World War II and was appointed Hawai‘i’s territorial governor by Dwight Eisenhower in 1953.

stability and prosperity to Hawai‘i’s companies and its workers, as well as tax revenues for public services. Hawai‘i had experienced only mild economic disruption during the depression of the previous decade. Shoemaker also dispelled the mainland myth that Hawai‘i’s prosperity was based on “cheap Oriental labor,” an image that had lingered since Baker’s day. Hawai‘i’s plantation workers were financially better off than mainland agricultural workers and less prone to seasonal unemployment. The “economic security of the average plantation worker in Hawaii,” Shoemaker explained, “is far greater than that of the farm or plantation worker on the mainland.” For Shoemaker such economic prosperity and security, however, came at the price of personal independence or what Baker would have called “democracy.”

The lack of personal independence was endemic to the very structure of the central unit in the sugar industry—the plantation. The plantation had been a vital instrument in expanding the sugar industry to arid lands that had not previously been used for any form of agriculture. But unlike a rural market town or independent farming community, it had not fostered civic growth. The plantation, as a community, was totally owned by the plantation company. It was a “small world in itself” where “anyone on any part of the plantation is a trespasser unless he has the permission of the management to be there.” Not only did the plantation world inhibit union development, it inhibited the rise of small independently owned businesses as well as participation in any form of local government. As Shoemaker explained, “[t]he complete dependence of employees upon the plantation in respect to every aspect of the life of the working community makes them less independent than farm laborers on the mainland.”

For Shoemaker, the paternalistic plantation had been a vital engine of economic expansion that no longer had a future because the labor force was increasingly a “citizen labor force” of Hawai‘i-born workers trained in American democratic ideals by the tax-supported public schools of the territory. Possibly the only aspect of plantation life that was not company owned were the schools. Shoemaker went into some detail on this new “citizen labor force” drawn from the children of Asian immigrants, particularly Japanese. It comprised only 12 percent of the labor force in 1930, but 41 percent by 1939. The economist noted that seminars held with Hawai‘i-born Japanese and Chinese students revealed that most would not accept the plantation life of their parents. They wanted increased occupational opportunity—and occupational opportunity in Hawai‘i. Whereas first generation workers at the turn of the century often returned to their homeland or migrated to the mainland, both options were effectively closed to the second generation. Japanese-Americans found themselves unwelcome in Japan. Hostile attitudes toward Asians on the U. S. mainland as well as unemployment on the Pacific Coast blocked any desire of Hawai‘i’s Nisei to migrate east.

41 Ibid., 70–1, 79.
Shoemaker made it clear that the Big Five would in some way have to adapt the sugar industry to the new citizen labor force.42

One of those ways would be acceptance of a rise in the power of labor, most likely signified by an increase in union activity as well as more highly skilled or professional plantation jobs that appealed to educated workers. Shoemaker was blunt in noting the unorganized state of labor versus the highly organized state of management. Even by 1939, “less than one twenty-fifth” of the territory’s labor force was organized and most of that organization had come in the last few years. Management, he noted, had a long history of “antagonism to labor organization” and was basically “anti-union.” But for Shoemaker the rising tide of citizen labor was a force to which the Big Five would have to adapt. Hawai‘i’s future—both for management and labor—was dependent on such an adaptation.43

Shoemaker’s analysis of territorial Hawai‘i, though dry when compared to Baker’s “feudal barons,” was insightful. The concentrated power of the Big Five’s sugar world had brought prosperity and stability to the entire population of the islands and a level of public services, particularly exemplified by the schools, that had produced the ideals, confidence, and demands of the rapidly emerging citizen labor force. But the Big Five’s power had also curbed certain avenues for citizen participation. While federal law had curbed the avenue of voting and political participation, Big Five policy had limited union participation, and the very organization of the plantation had stunted personal independence. In 1939, Hawai‘i was all at once an economically prosperous, but politically underdeveloped, community.

Shoemaker’s 1939 analysis was re-emphasized in 1940 with the publication of the Eagen Report, though the latter was rhetorically more strident and decidedly anti-Big Five. Edward Eagen, an NLRB field representative in Seattle, had come to Hawai‘i in 1937 to investigate unfair labor practices by the Big Five. He was not concerned with the overall structure of Hawaiian industry. Like Shoemaker, Eagen emphasized that the second-generation work force, educated in the public schools of the territory, was not content with the paternalistic welfare of the old plantation. Union organization and participation, not simply higher wages, were demanded by the new generation of workers, if they were to accept plantation work at all. His expectation that union organization would grow in the islands was far gloomier than Shoemaker predicted. He emphasized the “anti-unionism” of the Big Five and detailed the level of Big Five control. Virtually everything in the territory from sugar plantations and shipping, to the press, to the courts, and even to the U. S. Army and Navy, was under the thumb of the sugar factors. Eagen singled out Frank E. Thompson, a lawyer for the Matson line, as the chief culprit of Big Five coercion. Interestingly enough, the one aspect of territorial life that Eagen did not say the Big Five controlled was the public school system. Big Five dominance, Eagen claimed, was difficult for many observers to understand.

42 Ibid., 79, 208, 226-7.
43 Ibid., 198-203, 228.
because the "overabundance of hospitality" acted as a "drug or sleeping potion" for the "unsuspecting." Eagen concluded that there was no "truer picture of Fascism anywhere in the world than in the Hawaiian Islands." Despite his "fascist label," he found the individuals in the Big Five charming people who "conscientiously believe they are doing things in the proper way." He did not speculate further if such personal attitudes could lead to change. In 1937 he focused on control.

The reports of both Shoemaker and Eagen are intriguing to the researcher, but unlike Baker's earlier analysis, neither offers a comparative framework by which to judge the Big Five, Hawaiʻi's labor force, or the Hawaiian community in general. What was Hawaiʻi like in 1939? How would the Big Five compare to the elite of San Francisco or Seattle and their labor practices? If Shoemaker and Eagen offered no regional comparisons, a young researcher who set the tone for research on Hawaiʻi for the next half century did. In 1938, Andrew W. Lind, a new faculty member at the University of Hawaii, published An Island Community: Ecological Succession in Hawaii (Chicago, 1938). The book had been his doctoral dissertation in sociology at the University of Chicago under Robert E. Park. The comparative framework Lind chose for Hawaiʻi was the capitalist expansion of Europe into colonial regions. In general, the framework stressed the evolution or succession of different stages of development. In many ways these stages echoed the various "frontiers" of development that Frederick Jackson Turner used to describe the development of the American West. Turner, however, was not among Lind's models. He preferred Max Weber, Werner Sombart, Albert Keller, and other economists/sociologists of colonial regions.

Lind looked at Hawaiʻi from the earliest stages of European entry in the eighteenth century to the 1930s. Like Shoemaker, he was generally positive about his findings. He stressed the efficiency of the sugar plantation and the level of prosperity it had produced in the islands. He acknowledged the high level of control exercised by the Big Five, but he saw such control as the factor that had led to economic stability in the islands, particularly during the Depression of the 1930s. Economic prosperity and resident control were the prime factors that led Lind to note repeatedly that Hawaiʻi was "unlike other colonial regions." For example, the Hawaiian plantation, which he saw as efficient and non-exploitative of the land, was unlike the normative exploitative model. The efficient Hawaiian plantation, he noted, "is unmentioned in most

44 For the Eagen Report, see "Report of E. J. Eagen on the Hawaiian Islands from Hearings before the House Committee on Labor Board and Wagner Act," 3 May 1940 in U. S. House of Representatives, "Special Committee to Investigate the National Labor Relations Board." 76th Cong., 23d Sess., 11–23 Dec. 1940, 26 vols.: Eagen Report in vol. 22, 2524–4539, 4598–4624. NLRB investigator Eagen went to Honolulu in 1937 to observe and report on various hearings (including a labor dispute with Castle & Cooke) before the NLRB. His report, however, was not prepared and written until 1940 when the House Special Committee on the NLRB requested it at its hearings. For a comparison of the Shoemaker and Eagen reports, see Beechert, Working in Hawaiʻi, 270–3.

45 Lind, An Island Community, "Introduction."
theoretical discussions of the subject." Also the level of public services in Hawai‘i, particularly free public education, was decidedly unlike other colonial regions. Lind found the New England missionary heritage to be a positive force in both the plantations and the schools.46

Lind, like Shoemaker, focused on the lives of workers and labor relations as well as the general condition of the economy. In this regard the Hawaiian plantation, despite its efficiency as an economic institution, was becoming outmoded because it "assume[d] somewhat the role of an independent state by virtue of its control over labor." The plantation offered little in the way of occupational mobility or succession for the second and third generation of workers. These generations sought to leave unskilled labor, which still constituted 50 percent of the plantation work force in 1930. The path of opportunity often led away from the plantation, particularly to Honolulu and entry into the professions or small businesses. Lind noted that there was friction and resistance to such mobility into the upper levels of plantation management and in Caucasian owned firms, a fact often cited by Nisei students as an indication of the ceiling enforced by the Big Five. Lind was not surprised by this haole (Caucasian) resistance to occupational rise and saw it as a natural condition in evolving communities—one that would be resolved with the increasing education and voting power of the younger generations of workers. As in many of his other observations, he found racial barriers to occupational rise in Hawai‘i much weaker than in other colonial areas. He even saw concessions being made to labor that confirmed the increasing power of younger workers.47

Lind’s evolving dynamic model of the Hawaiian community was an optimistic and positive one. What problems the territory had were likely to be resolved in an evolutionary manner over the years. Lind often noted that Hawai‘i was unlike other colonial regions. Nonetheless by introducing the colonial expansion of European powers as a comparative framework, he set a tone in Hawaiian historiography for the next several decades. Though Lind did not see the Big Five as oppressive, others would soon label them colonial oppressors.48

By 1940, the power of the Big Five, as well as the evolution of a unique Hawaiian community in the years since 1898, had undergone extensive scrutiny. When Fortune magazine arrived in 1940 to survey the status of "Hawaii the Fort," the Singapore of the mid-Pacific, its reporter made wide use of those earlier studies, quoting freely and selectively from Ray Stannard Baker and Andrew Lind. The extensive control of the Big Five, with its antique paternalism and anti-unionism, was stressed—with the overriding observation that the sugar factors were quaintly provincial and outmoded by 1940. "If the rich haoles have an attitude toward labor problems that is out of line with

46 Ibid., 168–70.
48 For examples of the literature that criticizes the Big Five and emphasizes a colonial model, see the discussion of “democratic sagas” below and, in particular, Noel Kent, Islands Under the Influence (New York, 1983).
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the attitude recently cultivated on the U. S. mainland by the New Deal,” explained *Fortune*, “they also have the nineteenth-century virtue of noblesse oblige, which is seldom cultivated anywhere in 1940.”

The magazine also noted the new, educated generation of workers, but unlike Shoemaker or Lind, doubted that the Big Five paternalists would be able to adapt to this rising tide. So hidebound were the provincial elite in *Fortune’s* opinion that the magazine questioned the sincerity of the HSPA’s backing of statehood, claiming that the haoles feared an elected U. S. Senator of Japanese ancestry. *Fortune’s* reporter combined the comparative frameworks of the last quarter century and portrayed the Big Five as a strange blend of semi-feudal, paternalistic Yankees behaving like Old South planters on plantations that compared with those of the Dutch East Indies.

That *Fortune*, a business journal, would be negative and patronizing about Hawai‘i’s business elite may seem strange. The reason probably lay in neither the labor nor the business practices of the sugar factors. What annoyed *Fortune* was its perception of the Big Five’s attitude toward the U. S. military and the reluctance of the planters to concede that national defense rather than sugar production had become the prime purpose for Hawai‘i by 1940. The Big Five wanted to continue to devote land to sugar and pineapple rather than redirect it to diversified agriculture to feed the military forces. The life of soldiers and sailors was not easy in Hawai‘i because food prices in Big Five-controlled stores were higher than on the mainland. “Navy officers,” claimed the magazine, “complain persistently and uselessly about the Big Five and gouging prices.” *Fortune* saw the Army and Navy at loggerheads with the provincial Big Five, whose pride in Hawai‘i was more “civic” than “nationalist” and who glorified Hawai‘i as a home, not as a fort.” The reader could also sense that *Fortune* shared the military’s distrust of Hawai‘i’s Japanese population, which it described as “not precisely tops as garrison material.” The magazine doubted that the Big Five could be “counted upon” to control this population in case of a national emergency. With international tensions rising, *Fortune* thought the Big Five wanted to “keep Hawaii just the way it is.” A war would “spell disaster for the Big Five” and would change the “easy, delightful life that has been led for more than three decades by the richer haoles.”

In that vein, *Fortune* was partially correct. In 1941, the war came and closed the gates on at least part of that “delightful life.” With the 7 December attack on Pearl Harbor the territory was immediately placed under martial law, curtailing local self-government and individual civil rights until October 1944. The military also confronted Hawai‘i’s Japanese population. *Fortune* had predicted in 1940 that the Army

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49 “Hawaii: Sugar Covered Fort,” 78.
50 Ibid., 78, 82.
51 Ibid., 81–2. The prices charged in Big Five grocery stores and smaller stores that were supplied by the Big Five was an irritant to more than just the military. Lind also noted that it was the retail and wholesale operations of Theo Davies and American Factors and the indebtedness of individuals to those stores that was “the basis of a rather general disaffection of the public toward the Big Five.” (Lind, An Island Community, 183.)
and Navy would quickly establish concentration camps. Initially the military interned about one thousand suspected dissidents or saboteurs. However, President Roosevelt’s February 1942 Executive Order 9066, which evacuated and interned the entire Japanese-American population on the American West Coast, was not extended to Hawai‘i, though there is every evidence that this was the military’s desire. Exactly why Hawai‘i became exempt from the order is not entirely clear, but Honolulu lawyer Ted Tsukiyama has provided evidence that Charles Hemenway, the vice-president of Alexander & Baldwin, who spoke at the 1935 statehood hearings, persuaded Army authorities not to extend West Coast internment to Hawai‘i.52

The imposition of martial law also severely limited labor union activity, which had gained momentum by 1941 under the auspices of the San Francisco-based International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union (ILWU). If this avenue of participation by the islands’ workers was temporarily closed, another channel opened. By 1942, the U. S. military specifically excluded the Nisei from military service, but Hawai‘i’s Americans of Japanese Ancestry (AJAs) gained permission to form their own regiment—the 100th Infantry Battalion, which was soon supplemented by the 442nd Regimental Combat Team composed of Hawai‘i and mainland AJAs. Both units fought with distinction in Europe.53

With civilian government reinstated in 1944, and the war’s end in 1945, a new era dawned in the territory. Despite Fortune’s prediction, the Big Five and their sugar plantations survived the war, with sugar and pineapple production only slightly lower in 1945 than in 1941. However, the huge military presence in the territory, which would remain after the war, meant that the Big Five were no longer the single dominant factor in Hawai‘i’s economy. Union activity also grew to challenge the Big Five’s dominance. As early as 1944, the ILWU resumed its effort to organize labor. Such efforts were not necessarily thwarted by management. In 1943, the Hawaii Employers Council was organized to begin preparations for collective bargaining, and in 1945 the Republican-dominated territorial legislature passed the Hawaii Employment Relations Act sanctioning unionization of agricultural workers—a move ahead of all mainland states except Wisconsin. By 1946, most of the territory’s plantations had been organized.54

52 The basic source on Hawai‘i during World War II is Gwenfread Allen, Hawaii’s War Years (Honolulu, 1950). For the peculiar dilemmas presented by martial law, see also J. Garner Anthony, Hawaii Under Army Rule (Stanford, 1955). For the issue of the internment of Hawai‘i’s Japanese, see also Gary Okihiro, Cane Fires, 211–76. Figures for the number of Hawaiian Japanese interned vary from less than 1,000 in Allen to 1,875 in Okihiro. Higher estimates by Warren Nishimoto with the Oral History Collection at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa place the figure as high as 3,000. For Hemenway’s role in persuading the military not to extend Executive Order 9066 to Hawai‘i, see Tsukiyama, Charles Reed Hemenway.

53 For the story of the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, see Masayo Umezawa Duus, Unlikely Liberators: The Men of the 100th and the 442nd (Honolulu, 1987).

54 The literature on post-war labor issues in Hawai‘i is substantial. For sources already noted that are pro-labor and treat the post-war strikes as an end to colonialism, see Daws, Shoal of
The process of collective bargaining led to a series of often bitter strikes in the last half of the decade. The 1946 sugar strike closed the plantations for 79 days until an agreement was reached with the Big Five that gave wage increases, but ended the old perquisite system of housing and social welfare that underlay the paternalistic plantation. Other strikes in pineapple and shipping followed and culminated in the crippling Dock Strike of 1949 that lasted for six months. In these strikes, workers portrayed the Big Five as an intractable strike-breaking force, and management portrayed the ILWU as a radical Communist-backed union. However, labor peace, rather than strife, was more the outcome of the newly balanced forces of labor and management. Over the decade of the 1950s, the Big Five and the ILWU reached a modus operandi that resulted in only one major strike over the next four decades—the relatively mild Aloha Strike of 1958.

While the first gains of worker participation in the new post-war Hawaiian community came in union activity, political activity soon followed. Just as Lind and Shoemaker predicted, the inevitable coming of age of Hawai‘i-born Japanese and Chinese increased the number of registered voters in the new “citizen labor force.” The McCarran-Walter Act of 1952 made it possible for first generation Asians to become naturalized. The war experience of the men of the 100th and 442d also imbued the new voters with a heightened sense of democracy. They wanted to claim locally what they had fought for overseas. A good number of the veterans used the GI Bill to attend law school on the mainland. When veterans such as Daniel Inouye returned to Hawai‘i, the veteran/citizen work force not only provided an expanded set of voters, but an electable group of candidates for the territorial legislature. The new veterans and union members, in many cases the same people, united within the old territorial Democratic Party and ran against the Big Five-dominated Republican Party. In 1954, the Democrats elected a majority of the territorial legislature as well as the delegate to Congress, John A. Burns. With Burns in Washington, statehood was achieved in 1959. Though Republican Bill Quinn, the last appointed territorial governor, won the first elected state governorship, the Democratic Party has effectively controlled Hawai‘i from the so-called “Revolution of 1954” to the present day.55

Time, 357–81; Fuchs, Hawaii Pono, 354–76; Beechert, Working in Hawaii, 270–322; Kent, Islands Under the Influence, 133–40. For the best full treatment of the ILWU and the post-war strikes, see Sanford Zalburg, A Spark is Struck: Jack Hall and the ILWU in Hawaii (Honolulu, 1979). For the view that employers were ready to work with labor by the end of World War II, see Hitch, Islands in Transition, 149–70. For the company perspective that Castle & Cooke was ready to end the perquisite plantation system after World War II, see Taylor, From Land and Sea, 201–8. Fuchs, Hawaii Pono, 385–97 also analyzes the changes in the post-war Big Five to end paternalism.

55 For the rise of the Hawai‘i Democratic Party after World War II and the statehood movement, see Paul Phillips, Hawaii’s Democrats: Chasing the American Dream (Lanham, MD, 1982) and Roger Bell, Last Among Equals. For Daniel Inouye’s political career, see Daniel K. Inouye, Journey to Washington (Englewood, NJ, 1967). Other recent accounts of the political careers of Japanese-Americans include George R. Ariyoshi, With Obligation to All (Honolulu, 1997) and Matsui Takabuki, An Unlikely Revolutionary: Matsuo Takabuki and the Making of Modern Hawai‘i (Honolulu, 1998).
Since statehood, the historiography of Hawai‘i has been fashioned as a “democratic saga” much like other pioneer sagas of the American West. The pioneers in Hawai‘i were the men and women of Lind’s and Shoemaker’s new “citizen work force” of the late 1930s who finally achieved full participation in the American democracy. Each union and political victory became the markers along the way of the democratic journey. As in mainland sagas, a crucial ingredient was a seemingly insurmountable or hostile force that was overcome. In Hawai‘i’s saga the hostile force was the Big Five. Post-World War II histories describe and analyze the Big Five in either anachronistic or decidedly negative tones. Lawrence Fuchs, *Hawaii Pono* (New York, 1961); Gavan Daws, *Shoal of Time* (New York, 1968); and Edward Joesting, *Hawaii: An Uncommon History* (New York, 1972) see the Big Five as an anachronistic, pre-democratic elite out of step with the rest of the United States and an impediment to the achievement of economic and political democracy in the islands. More severe critics and critiques such as Noel Kent, *Islands Under the Influence* (New York, 1983) or Theon Wright, *The Disenchanted Isles* (New York, 1972) portray the Big Five oligarchy as anti-democratic island autocrats who held territorial Hawai‘i in “colonial” bondage, benefitting no one but themselves. In nearly all of the post-war treatments the Big Five emerge as a monolithic entity exerting undue local power from the late nineteenth century until the end of World War II.56

The post-war “democratic saga” is in many ways a true and inspirational story. But as in other western sagas, the pioneer generation that underwent the democratic journey is aging. The young men and women who reached voting age in the 1940s or even early 1950s are now two and three generations older. The time may well have come to reexamine parts of the saga to see if Hawai‘i’s story, like other western pioneer epics, contains heroic exaggerations that do not completely describe the pre-war Hawaiian community, particularly in a way that helps us understand what survived into the post-war world and continued to shape that community. If the Big Five and their ancien régime were crippled in the 1950s, they have been hearty survivors. All five firms still exist and are doing business in Hawai‘i, even though many of the old sugar fields have been turned into tourist or real estate developments.57

The post-war sagas selectively used much of the pre-war literature ranging from Baker to Fortune that criticized the Big Five and characterized the pre-war territorial community as “feudal” or anti-democratic. Yet much of that pre-war criticism was based on negative mainland assumptions about Hawai‘i’s Asian population. The Big Five were demonized for keeping out white settlers or for maintaining an alien work force that jeopardized the military security of the United States. When we filter out those assumptions, an infinitely more interesting community emerges. It is one that may be like the mainland West and one that was definitely conditioned by that West.

56 See footnote 2 above for citations on these basic histories. Full citation of Wright is *The Disenchanted Isles: The Story of the Second Revolution in Hawaii* (New York, 1972).

57 The five firms continue to operate in Hawai‘i although Castle & Cooke changed its name to Dole Foods in 1985 and is now headquartered in California. Theo Davies, the English-
What is most striking about the 1898–1941 territorial community is that it was, above all, a “bounded community.” The interactions among Hawai‘i’s various races, ethnic groups, and classes were determined by those boundaries. Though the very geographic nature of an island community suggests limits, geography had relatively little to do with the boundaries of territorial Hawai‘i. Most of the boundaries were imposed externally from the mainland, often by pressure from the western or Pacific Coast states. The most obvious of the boundaries were U. S. immigration and naturalization restrictions on Asians. As a result, the Asian groups that immigrated to Hawai‘i were bounded by specific generations or time periods. Chinese immigration to Hawai‘i, which peaked in the late 1870s and 1880s, was halted in 1898 by the federal Chinese Exclusion Acts that became operative in the islands with annexation. Japanese immigration, which began in mid-1880s, was halted for males in 1907–1908 by Theodore Roosevelt’s Gentlemen’s Agreement, and for females with the Immigration Act of 1924. The Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934 created a similar boundary for Filipino immigration.

Not only did U. S. laws and West Coast attitudes define the generation of immigrants that could immigrate to Hawai‘i, they also bound the mobility of those immigrants and their children once in Hawai‘i. Before immigration restrictions were placed on the Japanese, they migrated quite freely from Hawai‘i to California. But once immigration restrictions were in place, the Issei (first generation) had to stay in Hawai‘i or return to Japan. Even the Nisei, who, as citizens, could migrate to the mainland, were dissuaded from doing so before the war because of West Coast attitudes toward Asians. The generation of Japanese immigrants to Hawai‘i and their children would play out their sagas of political and occupational ambition in Hawai‘i, rather than in a variety of western places that could have attracted such an initially mobile labor force.

The bounding of the immigrant community was further enhanced by the plantation experience. Virtually all Asian immigrants—Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino—first arrived to work on the plantations. Thus the bounded first generation shared a particular work experience, even if they moved from the plantation after a relatively short period of time. This shared plantation experience has created what is known today in Hawai‘i as local identity. “Locals” include the children and grandchildren of plantation workers who have only the memories of their parents’ and grandparents’ work experience. While “local identity” binds Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos who shared the plantation work culture, it specifically excludes haoles who were the managers and owners of the plantations. Thus the plantation experience added internal ethnic and racial boundaries to those generated from the outside.58

owned firm, remained in the hands of Davies’s descendants until 1973, when it was purchased by the British/Hong Kong firm of Jardine Matheson & Co., Ltd.

Even the global military experience of the Nisei in World War II was one bounded and conditioned by mainland laws. Whereas soldiers from mainland states served in a wide assortment of units during the war, Hawai‘i’s Nisei soldiers were bound in two units, the 100th and 442d. They fought the war together and then they returned to Hawai‘i to lead the “democratic saga” together. The 100th Club and the 442d Club, which served both as social clubs and arenas for political activity, kept the solidarity of those bounded veterans alive for decades after the war.

Within this bounded pre-war community moved the Big Five and the haole business community. On the surface it may appear that the various boundaries of territorial life primarily circumscribed the lives and activities of “locals.” Much of the pre- and post-war Big Five critique asserts that the Big Five created those bounds. But were the Big Five not also conditioned by those externally imposed boundaries of the pre-war community? How did they react to those boundaries? Given their local power were they able to change those external boundaries or were they forced to accept them?

In the economic sphere the most obvious of the territory’s boundaries that affected the Big Five was the California sugar industry, dominated by Claus Spreckels. Prior to 1898, the Hawaiian sugar industry was an economic colony of San Francisco. To a substantial extent the Big Five altered or penetrated that boundary. Though Hawai‘i remained dependent on the mainland market and on the federal tariff against foreign sugar prior to World War II, the Big Five effectively centered ownership of Hawai‘i’s economy almost exclusively in the islands by 1910. Resident control was cited and highlighted in virtually every account of the Big Five from Baker to Fortune. What was the effect of this resident control versus absentee mainland or foreign control? From Baker to Fortune the consensus was that resident control led to a continual reinvestment of profits into the modernization of the sugar industry that stabilized Hawai‘i’s economy. Resident control produced a level of prosperity unknown in other plantation regions and a level of prosperity during the Great Depression that was striking even in the U. S. context. Lind noted that during the 1930s the absentee-owned and controlled member of the Big Five, Theo H. Davies & Co., suffered greater economic instability than the locally-owned firms. He also noted that the pineapple industry with its higher degree of mainland ownership might not have weathered the Depression without the intervention of the Big Five.59

If the resident control of the Big Five produced a remarkable prosperity in pre-war Hawai‘i, who were its beneficiaries? “The delightful world of the richer haoles” was often singled out as the most obvious product of sugar prosperity. By the 1930s, however, nearly all reports acknowledged the relative prosperity of sugar plantation

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59 Lind, An Island Community, 185–6.
workers compared to mainland farm workers. The “oppression” sounded by Harry Rudin at the 1937 statehood hearings fell on the confounded ears of even Democratic members of Congress dealing with Depression realities in the mainland states. Sugar profits fueled the many local philanthropies of the Big Five, such as the Samuel N. and Mary Castle Foundation, which pioneered kindergarten and settlement-house work in the islands. Sugar prosperity also provided the taxes for public services.60

The public school system of territorial Hawai‘i fueled by those taxes, as well as the philanthropically supported private schools, was central to the life of the bounded community. It was the locus and focus of civic participation and occupational ambition for the children of the disenfranchised work force, both in urban and rural settings. As such, it has attracted considerable attention and controversy from historians. Where did the Big Five stand on support of the school system? As in so many island controversies, the picture is clouded. On the one hand, the acknowledged quality of the school system and the level of tax support would suggest that the elite supported it. If they controlled the territorial legislature, surely they controlled the level of tax support. On the other hand, comments from HSPA representatives opposing “too much education given to children of lowly birth” can be cited as an indication that the planters wanted to undercut such democratic and occupational ambitions. And the creation of a set of English Standard Schools with entry based on English language ability is often cited, though not necessarily proven, as a subtle form of segregation within the system.61

However, the strong support of Big Five figures such as Charles Hemenway for the expansion of educational opportunities from the elementary schools through the University of Hawai‘i would argue in a positive direction for the Big Five’s view of the future. Certainly the reports of Shoemaker and Lind in the late 1930s, even of Ray Stannard Baker in 1912, emphasize elite support for an educational infrastructure in the territory that provided opportunities for its graduates. Despite Fortune’s mocking description of an outmoded noblesse oblige or a civic pride that was incompatible with

60 For a background on the work of the Castle charitable trusts, see Alfred L. Castle, A Century of Philanthropy: A History of the Samuel N. and Mary Castle Foundation (Honolulu, 1992).

61 For the best description of Hawai‘i’s school system and its impact on Asian-Americans, see Tamura, Americanization, Acculturation, and Ethnic Identity. Tamura cites (p. 92–3) a 1920 Russell Sage Foundation study that ranked Hawai‘i’s schools as 234 out of 53 state and territorial systems.


See also Fuchs, Hawaii Pono, 263–98, for a chapter praising the public school system for its enhancing of educational opportunity for Chinese- and Japanese-Americans at McKinley High and criticizing it for the English Standard Schools. Also Baker, “Human Nature in Hawai‘i,” 336, criticizes the HSPA’s view on schooling for immigrant children.
national security, the territory's social infrastructure was far more than a playground for the idle rich. It was certainly unlike the American South of the 1930s. A better understanding of what the Big Five and the Hawai'i of the 1930s were like truly begs comparisons to other sections of the American West and their school systems—particularly to California, where the schooling of Japanese- and Chinese-American students did not lead to the same degree of occupational opportunity as in Hawai'i.62

The Big Five's "antique paternalism" was conditioned by the ultimate reality and boundary of territorial life—the disenfranchisement of the first generation immigrant labor population. The absence of full political democracy created the greatest tension between the Big Five and their workers, as well as between Hawai'i and the mainland West. The Big Five and the haole business community were clearly empowered with a degree of political control unprecedented in most other American communities. What was the legacy of this power? Did the Big Five use it to further suppress the unenfranchised Asians, or did they act as the paternal trustees of a community that was evolving toward democracy with the aging of Hawai'i-born population? Of all issues concerning the Big Five, the one of political power is the most enigmatic and controversial. What were their attitudes about the eventual and evolving role of Asians in a future democracy? And were the haoles in any way bound or constrained by the mainland attitudes that insisted on Asian disenfranchisement?

On the one hand, critics cite the Big Five's anti-union stance of the 1920s and 1930s with its anti-Japanese rhetoric as evidence of a wider anti-Asian Big Five political agenda. On the other hand, the election of Hawai'i-born Chinese Hiram Fong as a Republican to the territorial legislature in 1938 and the strong loyalty of the Nisei veterans of the 100th and 442d to haole Congressional delegate Joseph Farrington would indicate that the haole community was ready for and accepting of the evolving new democracy.

The Big Five's stance toward a wider democracy was itself bounded and constrained by the feared reaction and backlash of mainland elites, military and political, who were truly anti-Asian and who repeatedly threatened to abolish even a limited democracy in the islands for commission government. In addition to the Navy and U. S. Representative Rankin, the call for commission government in the 1930s also came from U. S. Senator Hiram Bingham, grandson of the leader of the original 1820 band of Yankee missionaries to Hawai'i. Bingham's stance should call into question the idea that the Big Five had control over the military or even the successors of their own missionary families. To a great extent, the Big Five's stance toward a wider democracy was bound by hostile mainland views of the haole's effectiveness to rule or to control the emerging Asian-American electorate.63

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62 For an excellent comparison of occupational opportunity for Japanese-Americans in Hawai'i and California, see Tamura, Americanization, Acculturation, and Ethnic Identity, 211–34. For a similar analysis for Chinese-Americans, see Clarence Glick, Sojourners and Settlers: Chinese Migrants in Hawaii (Honolulu, 1980), 109–25.

63 Hiram Bingham, U. S. Senator from Connecticut, was born in Honolulu in 1875, the son of Hiram Bingham, Jr., a missionary to the Gilbert Islands. In 1932, he introduced a bill to
The views of the Big Five toward Hawai‘i’s evolving political democracy, including statehood, thus remain shrouded to the present day in a web of suspicion. Critics, as well as supporters, often find it difficult to say who spoke for the Big Five. Was there one monolithic voice, or as Baker observed in 1912, a spectrum of voices with differing views on every subject except the federal sugar tariff? Suspicion is further stoked by observers who claim that what the Big Five said in public they renounced in private. Typical is the suspicion launched by Fortune in 1940 that the HSPA’s public stand for statehood was not what the planters privately desired. Such frenzied reasoning marked the debate on statehood in the 1950s. Even in the 1980s some historians still asked, “Did the Big Five Want Statehood?” In effect, this was another way of saying, “Did the Big Five Want Democracy?” The enigma of the Big Five’s political viewpoint and even of who expressed it has endured the century.64

Where then do all the sagas and observations leave us in our understanding of the last territory to join the federal union? Economically, socially, and politically, territorial Hawai‘i was a community characterized by a wide set of boundaries that circumscribed the labor mobility and political activity of the haves as well as of the have-nots. Presiding over this bounded community was the Big Five, perennially one of the most observed, awed, and categorized oligarchies in twentieth-century America. Throughout the century, they have been called many things—southern, colonial, feudal, semi-feudal, and outmoded. By the century’s end they had survived most of the labels, but their territorial legacy remains difficult to grasp. Just what were the Big Five and the territorial community like? Were they possibly “western” or “progressive,” two labels that are rarely subscribed to the Big Five or pre-war Hawai‘i? While those adjectives may be as elusive to define and describe as the earlier labels, one thing seems clear: the bounded territorial community and conduct of the pre-war Big Five were definitely created and conditioned by the West. From the inner politics of the western sugar industry, to western demands for Asian immigration, to concerns for the military security of the Pacific Coast, western issues and prejudices shaped territorial Hawai‘i.

64 For the concerns over the Big Five’s true intentions toward statehood in the 1950s, see territorial delegate John Burns’s critique in John A. Burns, “Statehood and Hawaii’s People,” State Government 32 (Summer 1959): 151–5. For the lingering concerns on the issue in the 1980s, see interviews with Malcolm McNaughton and Robert McElrath in Perspectives on Hawai‘i’s Statehood (Honolulu, 1986). When interviewed in 1984, McNaughton was a former president of Castle & Cooke, McElrath was a former ILWU regional director. Both men said there was no significant opposition to statehood from the haole business community, except for Walter Dillingham, a powerful island industrialist but not a member of the Big Five. The oral history interviews in Perspectives were compiled by the Oral History Project, Social Science Research Institute, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.
Those western issues and prejudices also shaped—or misshaped—many of the pre-war observations of the Big Five as well as the post-war "democratic sagas." Certainly the time has come for western historians to look more closely at the last territory, not merely to unravel the enigma of the Big Five, but also to understand the images the West projected on territorial Hawai‘i.