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WOMEN IN HAWAI'I AND THE NINETEENTH AMENDMENT

Rumi Yasutake

On March 22, 1922, the Hawaiian Women's Republican Auxiliary Club held a rally in Honolulu. It was just three days prior to a special election to fill the vacancy caused by the untimely death of Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole, the current territorial delegate to the US Congress. According to an article in *The Woman Citizen*, the public organ of the National League of Women Voters (NLWV),

about five hundred women composed the audience, filling the hall to capacity. They were Hawaiian and part-Hawaiian, varying from pure dark brown types to fair mixtures with English, American or Chinese. . . . Tiny brown babies were there in the arms of mothers who wore *lauhala* hats, around whose rims were yellow ribbons bearing the inscription, "Vote for Baldwin." There were young matrons and business women, some of them having so much white blood in their veins that they did not show their Polynesian ancestry. There were country women from distant sugar plantations who had come into Honolulu to take part in this political rally. There were in the gathering women of great wealth, whose ancestors had owned vast tracts of fertile land under the monarchy. The meeting opened with a prayer in the Hawaiian language by the minister.¹

The article conveyed the racial and cultural hybridity and class diversity of Native Hawaiian woman suffragists. For Native Hawaiian women, suffrage was a means to recover their political and economic rights lost in the modern American system. With the application of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Territory of Hawai'i, Native Hawaiian women voters became the most enthusiastic and formidable political force, accomplishing complete woman suffrage that included the right to hold elected office. According to the article, "Native Hawaiian women are so politically minded that they need not to be urged, prodded, baited and educated to use the ballot. They cannot resist the ballot."² Notably, however, these Native Hawaiian women gathered to support the white-settler candidate Harry Alexander Baldwin (1871–1946), an incumbent territorial senator who won the Republican nomination for the special election. His mother was a daughter of a pioneer American missionary couple, and his father Henry Perrine Baldwin was known as the "most successful sugar planter in the islands," who ensured the family a status almost equal to that of ruling Native Hawaiian families

on the island of Maui.³ His wife, Ethel Frances Smith Baldwin (1879–1967), was also a third-generation descendant of pioneer missionaries.⁴

Hawai'i in the early twentieth century was full of ironic legacies left by the mission to civilize the islands that white-settler missionary wives from the US Northeast pursued. While assisting their husbands in “uplifting” and “civilizing” the islands, they propagated their cult of womanhood and separate-sphere ideology on a society in which women had established considerable public power. When the first group of missionaries arrived in the islands in 1820, Native Hawaiian women of the ruling rank enjoyed political and economic power. In the name of civilizing and modernizing Hawaiian society, white-settler missionary wives contributed to curtailing the power of women and monarchs. White-settler men of missionary heritage meanwhile assumed greater roles in the islands' politics and economy.⁵ They “democratized” politics and landownership and “modernized” the self-sustaining society of Native Hawaiians into the multiracial society that became heavily dependent on the sugar business. By the end of the nineteenth century, despite strong opposition from Native Hawaiian women and men, white-settler men of American extraction deposed Queen Lili'uokalani, formed a republic, and ultimately had the republic annexed by the United States.⁶

Concurrently, racial and cultural hybridization took place, as Hawaiian society widely accepted interracial marriage and never banned it. Landed Native Hawaiian women of the chiefess rank typically intermarried with successful foreign businessmen to survive the social transformation.⁷ Collaborating with these hybrid Native Hawaiian women of nobility, white-settler women with missionary connections gained influence to play a part in creating the political milieu, about which the journalist Ray Stannard Baker made a widely quoted statement in the early 1910s that there was no place with “so much philanthropy and so little democracy” as Hawai'i.⁸

The Nineteenth Amendment opened the door for a great spectrum of women citizens to participate in island politics to challenge the white male oligarchic rule. Due to the oligarchy and the islands' semicolonial status in the US political system, however, democratization of politics in Hawai'i proceeded in a complex way. This essay examines the intricacy of women's political activism in Hawai'i, where women of diverse cultural and racial backgrounds contended, negotiated, and collaborated with each other to accomplish complete woman suffrage in the early twentieth century.

Importantly, the prerogative to enfranchise the women of Hawai'i rested in the hands of the federal government that was responsible for the Hawaiian Organic Act, the territorial constitution. Mainland suffragists—members of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) and its successor, the NLWV—accordingly kept tabs on Hawai'i from the

time the islands became a US "possession" in 1898. When the US Congress took the prerogative of writing the Hawaiian Organic Act, NAWSA leaders endeavored to make Hawai'i the first case to franchise women by federal action. Carrie Chapman Catt, the NAWSA president, demanded in vain that the word *male* be omitted from the proposed territorial constitution, arguing that "the declared intention of the United States in annexing the Hawaiian Islands [was] to give them the benefits of the most advanced civilization."⁹ By then, woman suffrage had become an indicator of advanced civilization for NAWSA members.¹⁰

The Hawaiian Organic Act of 1900 made suffrage an exclusively male privilege. To the dismay of white men in Hawai'i, however, the act granted suffrage to male citizens of mature age regardless of their economic means so long as they were literate in either English or Hawaiian. Native Hawaiians thus constituted the majority of voters from the postannexation era through 1922 and the largest voter group by race until 1938.¹¹ The literacy requirement barred foreign-born Asians from suffrage, and the application of the US law categorized them as "aliens ineligible to citizenship." Children born to this group in Hawai'i, however, were American citizens, and, by acquiring a command of English and Americanism, they eventually entered into the electorate to outnumber Native Hawaiians.¹²

Excluded from suffrage, Native Hawaiian women became the principal force in the islands' woman suffrage movement. In contrast, white-settler women were caught by "settler anxiety" because the Native Hawaiian vote, already a majority, would double if women were enfranchised.¹³ In fact, during her visit to Hawai'i in 1912, Carrie Chapman Catt was surprised to experience the enthusiasm of "half-caste," but not white, women for the suffrage cause. On her arrival, Catt was welcomed at the port of Honolulu by racially and culturally hybrid Native Hawaiian women officers of the Woman's Equal Suffrage Association of Hawai'i (WESAH), the woman suffrage group recently formed by mostly "Hawaiian" or "Part-Hawaiian" women. Wilhelmina Kekelaokalaninui Widemann Dowsett, a hybrid Native Hawaiian woman born to a German planter father and Native Hawaiian mother of the chiefess rank, led the WESAH. Catt collaborated with WESAH officers in promoting the suffrage cause in the islands and assisted them in applying for affiliation to the NAWSA.¹⁴

Although it was the Nineteenth Amendment that granted women citizens in Hawai'i the right to vote, mainland suffragists, who followed Catt to promote the woman suffrage cause in the islands, were oblivious to the territory's political milieu and falsely impressed with its willingness to enfranchise women. They became convinced that once the Organic Act was amended to place suffrage under the purview of the territorial government, women in Hawai'i would be enfranchised immediately. In 1915, the

suffragist Alice Locke Park of Palo Alto, California, found that woman suffrage had “no political opponents” and reported on the similarity between the situation of Hawai‘i and that of Arizona prior to the suffrage victory.¹⁵ The territorial legislature adopted a resolution in 1915 that requested Prince Kūhiō, the territorial delegate to the US House of Representatives, “to urge upon Congress the passage of an amendment to the Organic Act” extending the right to vote to women.¹⁶ Woman suffragists in Hawai‘i, however, heard no progress about it for two years. In early 1917, another mainland suffragist, Almira Hollander Pitman of Brookline, Massachusetts, visited the islands. After conversing with nearly all members of the territorial legislature, she also became convinced of their approval of the woman suffrage bill. By then, the woman suffrage movement in Hawai‘i that had been initiated by hybrid Native Hawaiian women had won the participation of women from various racial and class backgrounds, including some of the once-hesitant white-settler women of missionary heritage as well as women of Asian ancestry.¹⁷

Consequently, the NAWSA successfully lobbied Congress to relegate the prerogative of enfranchising women to the territorial legislature. Their achievement in 1918, however, had no effect on women in Hawai‘i since the territorial legislature entangled the woman suffrage issue with questions as to how and when to enfranchise women and who would vote on the issue.¹⁸ According to the historian Roger Bell, the debate on woman suffrage in the 1910s was “submerged” in the issue of “how to avoid or at least delay the triumph of the non-Caucasian majority in politics, economics, and society” in the islands.¹⁹ Meanwhile, the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution, which prohibited the federal government and each state from disfranchising women, passed both houses of Congress and was ratified by three-fourths of the states. This amendment, proclaimed by Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby on August 26, 1920, included the women of US territories.²⁰

The amendment finally granted suffrage to women citizens of Hawai‘i, but local white oligarchic men raised questions about women’s eligibility to hold elective office. In the local primary and general elections of 1920, Native Hawaiian Democrat men and women, who believed that women were granted with both rights by the Nineteenth Amendment, went ahead and placed their names as candidates. For example, Helen Makakoa Sniffen of the island of Maui and Mary Ha‘aheo Kinimaka Atcherley of the island of O‘ahu entered the race for the territorial senate on the Democratic ticket.²¹ The territorial Attorney General Harry Irwin nonetheless insisted that the Organic Act needed to be amended to entitle women to hold elected office, referring to section thirty-four of the act that required “a male citizen of the United States” to be eligible for election as a territorial senator.²²

Perhaps not to be outdone by their Native Hawaiian women counterparts, white-settler women also became politically active. Unlike Native Hawaiian women's enthusiasm to vote and be voted for in an election, however, white women's political activism was more reserved. They intended to use their influence and votes to elect candidates who would promote their causes. For example, on the island of Maui where women ran for the primary on the Democratic ticket, the Maui Woman's Club, a women's civic organization, began holding meetings to invite women with various racial and ethnic backgrounds to discuss political issues of women's concern. By organizing such meetings, Ethel Frances Smith Baldwin, an influential member of the club and the island's women's community, ultimately assisted her husband, then a Republican territorial senator seeking reelection, to win in 1920.²³

Such white-settler women's "civilized" political activism was, arguably, emulated by some Native Hawaiian women of nobility. In the special election of March 1922, which was held to fill the unexpected term of the territorial delegate to the US House of Representatives, women's eligibility to hold office once again became an issue. Pressured by women, Territorial Governor Wallace R. Farrington inquired about the issue to Washington. The answer he received was that there was nothing to prevent a woman from being a candidate for election as a territorial delegate to the US Congress, but if she should be elected, her eligibility would be judged by the US House of Representatives. Thus, Native Hawaiian women, including Mary Ha'aheo Kinimaka Atcherley of O'ahu, were determined to enter the race, but Princess Kalaniana'ole, the widow of Prince Kūhiō and a descendant of the Kamehameha line, declined to run, although Native Hawaiian women urged her to seek the seat long occupied by her late husband.²⁴ Former woman suffragists, both Native Hawaiian and white, of the prominent class ironically came together to support the Republican territorial senator Harry A. Baldwin for the office, instead of the controversial Mary Ha'aheo Kinimaka Atcherley, a strong advocate of women's complete right of suffrage who ultimately ran as an independent candidate.²⁵ When Baldwin won the Republican nomination, he was endorsed by Princess Kawānanakoa—widow of the late Prince Kūhiō's brother, Prince David. Her mother was hybrid Maui chiefess Abigail Kuaihelani Maipinepine Campbell who had taken leadership in resisting white-settler colonialism during the takeover of the Hawaiian nation.²⁶

Having been disappointed by male island politics that had failed to enfranchise women, these Native Hawaiian and white women leaders of the prominent class, who had been divided over the US annexation, mended the rift and came together to maximize their influence and attain women's full right of suffrage. Pioneer white women missionaries' efforts

to persuade Hawaiian women to adopt the ideology of separate spheres had apparently facilitated close interaction between these two groups of women. In engaging in philanthropic and maternalistic endeavors, they had been contending, negotiating, and collaborating with each other for generations.²⁷ Hybrid Native Hawaiian women of the nobility arguably stood socially and culturally closer to white women of old-timer missionary families who controlled the local Republican Party than less-privileged Native Hawaiian women. Furthermore, some Native Hawaiians—due to political, familial, generational, or regional rivalries—sought affiliation with the Democratic Party that newly arrived white men had formed.²⁸

Princess Kawānanakoa's endorsement mobilized Native Hawaiian women's support for the Republican nominee Baldwin by forming Republican women's clubs. Many of them were noticeably composed entirely of Native Hawaiians.²⁹ On the island of Maui, the first such club, the Hawaiian Women's Republican Auxiliary (HWRAC), organized on March 16, 1922, by gathering 250 to 300 women from Central and East Maui. Present at the meeting was Ethel F. S. Baldwin, promoting her husband's image as a politician who was friendly both to women and Hawaiians.³⁰ Six days later, on March 22, the Honolulu branch of HWRAC held a rally for Baldwin, as mentioned at the beginning of this essay.³¹

With such concerted efforts of influential white and Native Hawaiian women leaders and their followers, Baldwin won the special election in a territorial landslide on March 25, 1922.³² During his term as the territorial delegate to Congress, Baldwin fulfilled his campaign pledge to make women officially eligible for public office. With President Harding's signing of the amendment to the Organic Act on September 15, 1922, women citizens in Hawai'i were assured of their right to hold elective office as a member of the territorial house of representatives, a territorial senator, or the territorial delegate to the US House of Representatives.³³ As a consequence, in 1924, running on the Republican ticket from the island of Kaua'i, hybrid Native Hawaiian Rosalie Enos Lyons Keli'inoi (1875–1952) became the first woman elected as a territorial legislator. Her most notable achievement was amending the territorial statutes to recover married women's property rights. She also introduced a bill to permit women to serve on juries, but it failed because it was considered too radical at the time.³⁴ She was nonetheless followed by white and nonwhite women who took political leadership locally, nationally, and internationally. For example, Patsy Mink Takemoto (1927–2002), a Japanese American from the island of Maui, became the first woman of color elected to the US Congress in 1964 and engaged in generating trans-Pacific antimilitary and antinuclear movements.³⁵

The Nineteenth Amendment opened the door for women citizens in Hawai'i to enter into the US political arena, but to do so, they had to skill-

fully maneuver through the white male oligarchic rule. Native Hawaiian women's enthusiasm to use suffrage "right" pressed other racial groups of women citizens to participate in politics, which in the process created a political milieu distinct to multiracial Hawai'i.

NOTES

¹Edith Stone, "Do Women Like Politics?—Ask Hawaii," *The Woman Citizen*, July 15, 1922, 16.

²*Ibid.*

³A. Grove Day, *A Biographical Dictionary: History Makers of Hawaii* (Honolulu: Mutual Publishing of Honolulu, 1984), 7–8.

⁴Frances B. Cameron and Barbara B. Lyons, "Baldwin, Ethel Frances Smith," in *Notable Women of Hawaii*, ed. Barbara Bennett Peterson (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1984), 19–22.

⁵Patricia Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty: American Missionary Wives in Nineteenth Century Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989); and Judith Gething, "Christianity and Coverture: Impact on the Legal Status of Women in Hawaii, 1820–1920," *The Hawaiian Journal of History* 11 (1977): 188–220.

⁶Jonathan Kay Kamakawiwo'ole Osorio, *Dismembering Lāhui: A History of the Hawaiian Nation to 1887* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002); and Noenoe K. Silva, *Aloha Betrayed: Native Hawaiian Resistance to American Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁷Davianna Pōmaika'i McGregor, "Constructed Images of Native Hawaiian Women," in *Asian/Pacific Islander American Women: A Historical Anthology*, ed. Shirley Hume and Gail M. Nomura (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 25–41.

⁸Baker's statement was quoted, for example, in Andrew W. Lind, *Hawaii's People* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1955), 89–90; and Gary Y. Okihiro, *Cane Fires: The Anti-Japanese Movement in Hawai'i, 1865–1945* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), 17. As for the meaning of Baker's statement, see John S. Whithead, "Western Progressives, Old South Planters, or Colonial Oppressors: The Enigma of Hawai'i's 'Big Five,' 1898–1940," *Western Historical Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (1999): 295–326.

⁹Susan B. Anthony and Ida Husted Harper, eds., *The History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 4, 1883–1900 (Indianapolis, IN: Hollenbeck Press, 1902), 346.

¹⁰Allison Sneider, *Suffragists in an Imperial Age: U.S. Expansion and the Woman Question, 1870–1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 104–114.

¹¹Lawrence H. Fuchs, *Hawaii Pono "Hawaii the Excellent": An Ethnic and Political History* (Honolulu: Bess Press, 1961), 152–181.

¹²Lind, *Hawaii's People*, 90–92; Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Eileen H. Tamura, *Americanization, Acculturation, and Ethnic Identity: The Nisei Generation in Hawaii* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

¹³Patricia Grimshaw, "Settler Anxieties, Indigenous Peoples, and Women's Suffrage in the Colonies of Australia, New Zealand, and Hawai'i, 1888 to 1902," *Pacific Historical Review* 69, no. 4 (2000): 553–572.

¹⁴Ida Husted Harper, ed., *The History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 6, 1900–1920 (New York: J. J. Little & Ives Co., 1922), 716; Carrie Chapman Catt, *Carrie Chapman Catt Papers: Diaries, 1911–1923: Korea; Japan; and Honolulu, Hawaii, Sept. 28–Oct. 31, 1912*, reel 1, pp. 40, 42, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; "Mrs. Chapman Catt Speaks to Hawaii Audience on Suffrage," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, October 29, 1912; and "Hawaiians Mourn," *The Independent* (Honolulu, HI), February 7, 1899.

¹⁵Alice Park, "Moving towards Woman Suffrage," *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, March 3, 1915, in scrapbook, book 1, p. 108, Alice Park Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

¹⁶*Journal of the House of Representatives of the Eighth Legislature of the Territory of Hawaii, Regular Session 1915* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Gazette Co., 1915), 457, 1019, and 1043.

¹⁷Harper, *The History of Woman Suffrage*, 6: 717; and "Benjamin F. Pitman," *New York Times*, July 3, 1918.

¹⁸Harper, *The History of Woman Suffrage*, 6: 716–719; and Rumi Yasutake, "Re-Franchising of Women of Hawai'i, 1912–1920: The Politics of Gender, Sovereignty, Race, and Rank at the Crossroads of the Pacific," in *Gendering the Trans-Pacific World*, ed. Catherine Ceniza Choy and Judy Tzu-Chun Wu (Boston, MA: Brill, 2017), 114–139.

¹⁹Roger Bell, *Last among Equals: Hawaiian Statehood and American Politics* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1984), 45.

²⁰Harper, *The History of Woman Suffrage*, 6: 719.

²¹"Maui Woman First to Seek Candidacy: Mrs. Helen M. Sniffen Sends Papers," *The Maui News*, September 3, 1920, 1; and "Nomination Papers of Women Accepted," *The Maui News*, September 10, 1920, 7. On the island of Maui, Alice Kekukai S. Kaae also had her name listed on the ballot for territorial legislature on the Democratic ticket for the primary. "Tabulation," *The Maui News*, October 15, 1920, 8.

²²"Suit to Determine Right of Women to Seek Office Advised," *The Maui News*, October 8, 1920, 8.

²³"Candidates Tell Women Voters Where They Stand on Questions Propounded," *The Maui News*, October 15, 1920, 1; and "Mrs. Atcherley Loses by A Heavy Plurality," *Hilo Daily Tribune*, November 4, 1920, 6.

²⁴"Women May Run for Office but Rest Doubtful," *The Maui News*, February 10, 1922, 1; and Eileen Root, "Kalaniana'ole, Princess Elizabeth Kahanu Kaleiwohi-Kaauwai," in Peterson, *Notable Women of Hawaii*, 186–189.

²⁵"Maui Leads All in Great Vote Given Her Candidate," *The Maui News*, March 28, 1922, 1; and Stone, "Do Women Like Politics?—Ask Hawaii."

²⁶"Correction Offered," *The Maui News*, February 21, 1922, 8; and Gwenfread E. Allen, "Kawananakoa, Abigail Wahi'ika'ahu'ula Campbell," in Peterson, *Notable Women of Hawaii*, 209–211.

²⁷For example, see Grimshaw, *Paths of Duty*.

²⁸Fuchs, *Hawaii Pono "Hawaii the Excellent,"* 182–183.

²⁹"G.O.P. Women Launch Two Precinct Clubs," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, February 28, 1922, 12.

³⁰"Women of Maui Organize to Do Important Work," *The Maui News*, March 17, 1922, 1.

³¹Stone, "Do Women Like Politics?—Ask Hawaii."

³²"Landslide for Baldwin in All of Territory," *Honolulu-Star Bulletin*, March 26, 1922, 1.

³³"Bill Giving Women Right to Hold Office Is Passed by Senate," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, September 1, 1922, 3; "No Disqualification of Sex," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, September 21, 1922, 6; and "Three Women Eligible for Hawaii House," *Honolulu Star-Bulletin*, September 22, 1922, 1.

³⁴Catherine Kekoa Enomoto, "Keli'inoi, Rosalie Enos Lyons," in Peterson, *Notable Women of Hawaii'i*, 214–216.

³⁵Mari J. Matsuda, ed., *Called from Within: Early Women Lawyers of Hawaii'i* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii'i Press, 1992); and Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, "The Dead, the Living, and the Sacred: Patsy Mink, Anti-Militarism, and Reimagining the Pacific World," in "Radical Transnationalism: Reimagining Solidarities, Violence, Empires," special issue, *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 18, no. 2 (2019).