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## Captain Cook: A Harmful Legacy that Begins with Mail **[Revision]**

### **Introduction**

Across the island of Hawai'i there are many areas that were named using a traditional Hawaiian naming system, such as Holualoa, Kahalu'u, Keauhou, Kainaliu, and Ke'ei. However, one area's name stands out from the rest – a census designated place entitled Captain Cook (Take Back Ka'awoloa [TBK], 2014). Given this discrepancy and the fact that Captain Cook was a European sailor who harmed Hawaiians, it is important to examine how straying from the ahupua'a and honoring this name can impact residents. To do so, I detail the traditional ahupua'a naming system and trace the history of the name 'Captain Cook' relying on journal articles, blogs, petitions, oral histories, and books. This analysis illustrates that the 'Captain Cook' name disrupts Hawaiian identity formation and remembers a painful history for Hawaiians while glorifying a Eurocentric perspective that erases Hawaiian history. Despite such harm, Hawaiians continue to advocate for the traditional 'Ka'awoloa' name through protest.

### **The Hawaiian Ahupua'a Naming System**

During the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Hawaiian Islands utilized a land division system called the ahupua'a which informed how places were named. Under this system, the four largest islands – Hawai'i, Maui, Kauai, and Oahu – were divided into moku, or districts. Each moku was then divided into ahupua'a which were sections of land that spanned from the mountain summit down to the reef edge in the ocean. The ahupua'a were divided for the respective communities within

them to sustain themselves from the land. Thus, each area had all the natural resources the community needed including plants, animals, and water to support human life. The ahupua'a were marked by physical natural boundaries, such as a large rock, line of trees, or mountain ridges (Kamehama Schools Press, 1994). The boundaries and the natural features within the ahupua'a gave rise to their respective names. This set a precedent of Hawaiian areas being named after their physical environment which honored the intense link between Hawaiian life, their physical environment, and the reciprocal and sustainable relationship between these two (Young, 2017). As communities grew, land divisions smaller than the ahupua'a were named following the traditional ahupua'a system of deriving names from the land. For example, the flat and fan-shaped lava peninsula on the west side of the Island of Hawai'i was originally named Ka'awoloa meaning 'awa plant' as the land's shape resembles the plant's leaf (Young, 2017). The Ka'awoloa name held strong until the 20<sup>th</sup> century when it was renamed Captain Cook – a name that is still used and has a rich history that will be analyzed next (Greenwell, 1981).

### **The Root: Captain Cook Coffee Company and Mail**

When the U.S. annexed Hawai'i in 1898, one major development was the U.S. postal service expanding across the islands ultimately resulting in the 'Captain Cook' name (TBK, 2014). The post offices were often established in well-trafficked areas like a central store or business in the community (Young, 2017). In 1916, the postal service sought to establish an office in the area then still known as Ka'awoloa. The gentleman charged with finding the site first inquired at the main general store but was sent to a larger business nearby: the Captain Cook Coffee Company. An agreement was reached that the post office would be established in the company's office, and it would be named Captain Cook. From then on, the area was officially known as Captain Cook. This name was further institutionalized when the U.S. incorporated it as

a census-designated place, or a populated area named for statistical purposes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021), also titled ‘Captain Cook’ (TBK, 2014).

To understand the significance of this name, we must examine the Captain Cook Coffee Company’s history. In the 1880s, a British immigrant named Robert Ronson Hind acquired land to grow coffee in the Ka’awoloa area, thus starting the Captain Cook Coffee Company (Stratton, n.d). The company served as the “middleman” between local farmers and the larger international coffee market (Kona Historical Society [KHS], 2020). As Yosoto Egami (1981), the eldest son of local coffee farmers, recalls:

When [coffee farmers] lease [from Captain Cook Coffee Company], they have to sign a contract that 'I promise to give all the crop to Captain Cook.' So, in other words, you are tied down with the company. You cannot sell to outsiders (261).

Through this arrangement, Captain Cook Coffee Company grew to be one of the two largest coffee companies dominating the Hawaiian market (KHS, 2020). While the company grew, local farmers did not receive adequate returns – Egami (1981) also remembers that struggling farmers tried to smuggle coffee to sell elsewhere because they could make more money independently (270). Thus, Captain Cook Coffee Company’s success hinged on the exploitation of local farmers. While this history provides partial context for the ‘Captain Cook’ name, one must dive deeper into the Captain Cook Coffee Company history itself.

### **Looking Deeper: Captain Cook**

Since the Captain Cook Coffee Company was named after the European Sailor, Captain James Cook, I now detail the history of Captain Cook himself to further understand the name’s significance. Captain James Cook and his crew were the first Europeans to arrive to the Hawaiian Islands on January 18, 1778. Bearing two ships, the *Discovery* and the *Resolution*,

Cook and his Crew first stopped at Kaumuali'i on the small island Kaua'i. They initially battled with the Hawaiian locals until the chief mother of Kaumuali'i offered her own granddaughter as a woman for Cook to promote peace. Hawaiian women followed suit trading sexual favors for iron. The Europeans then continued their initial mission to secure a passage for growing commerce between the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans for Britain. They grew frustrated with these efforts and returned to the island of Hawai'i in 1779 at the sacred Kealakekua Bay (Arista, n.d).

When Cook and his crew arrived, some Hawaiians believed that Cook was a god which is a historical interpretation that is still highly debated. Hawaiians consider Kealakekua Bay to be the sacred harbor of their fertility god Lono and Cook's arrival also happened to coincide with the Hawaiian festival dedicated to Lono – Makahiki. Due to the location and timing of Cook's arrival, the Hawaiians welcomed Cook and his crew as gods with some believing Cook to be Lono himself (A&E Television Networks, 2010). However, this fact is adamantly debated in academic literature with Cultural Anthropology scholars Sahlins and Obeyesekere taking opposing sides. Sahlins argues that Hawaiians did think Cook was Lono citing Europeans' journal entries while Obeyesekere argues that colonial attitudes shaped a European god complex that influences this perspective. Perkins (2020), a Hawaiian and Indigenous theory scholar, notes that this debate often misses the actual Hawaiian perspective. Hawaiian literature indicates that the locals initially may have mistaken Cook as Lono, but this quickly changed when he did not pass the test of a God. He cites Kamehameha Schools (1961) *Ruling Chiefs of Hawaii* which specifically details that some Hawaiian chiefs said:

Here is the test of a god: if we tempt them and they do not open their gourd container which holds their ancestral gods ('aumakua) then they are themselves gods, but if they open the sacred gourds (ipu kapu) [that is, if they yield to the temptation of women], then

they are not gods – they are foreigners (haole) (170).

Since Cook and his crew did have sexual relations with Hawaiian women, Perkins (2020) claims that this supports the Hawaiian perspective which did not ultimately declare Cook as Lono.

After the Hawaiians determined that Cook and his crew were not gods, the peaceful relationship turned violent leading to Cook's eventual death. The Europeans greedily took resources from the area for their ships causing tension between the natives and crew members. The crew attempted to leave Hawai'i, but treacherous sea conditions damaged vital pieces of the *Resolution* forcing the crew to return to Kealahou Bay less than one week later. Upon return, Hawaiians stole armorers' tongs and a cutter from the *Discovery* prompting Cook to attempt to take a Hawaiian chief, Kalani'opu'u, hostage (Hiney, 2001). During this attempt, Europeans shot and killed a lower-ranked Hawaiian chief causing Hawaiians to retaliate. Cook and his men fought back with firearms, but the Hawaiians overwhelmed them, killing Cook and four marines. In return, the Englishmen fired their cannons and muskets from their ships killing approximately 30 Hawaiians (A&E Television Networks, 2010). A truce was soon declared, and the *Resolution* and the *Discovery* left Hawaii with Captain Cook's remains on February 22, 1779 (Hiney, 2001).

Although Captain Cook did not stay long on the Hawaiian Islands, the crew brought disease that had detrimental effects on the native population for decades. After Cook arrived in Hawaii, infectious diseases and illnesses, such as measles, chicken pox, polio, and tuberculosis, devastated the native population ultimately killing thousands (Goo, 2015). According to the Pew Research Center (2015), 1 in 17 Native Hawaiians died in the two years following Cook's arrival. The population decline continued leading to a 48% decline by 1800, a 71% decline by 1820, and an 84% decline by 1840. For accuracy, the study notes that this population decline does not account for any Hawaiians who may have moved throughout the period. However, they

also stress that a dramatic decline would still be evident with these considered (Goo, 2015).

Thus, Cook left a catastrophic legacy on the native population with deadly illnesses.

### **What the History Means**

The history of the name ‘Captain Cook’ has important implications for Native Hawaiians’ ability to honor their rightful cultural identity and appropriate history. Thus far, I have traced the history of the name of the census-designated place Captain Cook which required examining the traditional ahupua’a Hawai’i naming system, the modern post office naming system, the Captain Cook Coffee Company, and Captain Cook himself. Next, I will contextualize this history to illustrate how the ‘Captain Cook’ name disrespects the ahupua’a system, disrupts Hawaiians’ identity, and remembers a painful history for Hawaiians involving financial abuse and ancestral lives lost whilst celebrating a Eurocentric perspective that erases Hawaiian history.

The initial change from ‘Ka’awoloa’ to ‘Captain Cook’ disregarded the traditional ahupua’a system, thus disrupting Hawaiian identity formation. Although other nearby post offices were still in central areas like business offices, they adhered to the traditional ahupua’a names. Other than convenience, there was no reason that the ‘Ka’awoloa’ name should not have been adopted by the post office. Sherwood Greenwell, a grandson of a Captain Cook Coffee Company staff, notes that “it could have been called Ka’awaloa (post office) if they wanted to name it the name of the land” (679) indicating that there is no known reason that they did not follow ahupua’a naming guidelines. This disregard for the ahupua’a is disrespectful, but also damaging to local Hawaiians as the ahupua’a informs their identity. As a local Hawaiian best describes: “Our Hawaiian identity is tied to the ahupua’a. The truth of our homeland reflected in stories and names is the nature of our connection to life itself” (TBK, 2014). Thus, the initial

‘Captain Cook’ name digressing from the ahupua’a removes the connection to the land ultimately disrupting Hawaiians’ identity formation.

The historical context of the name also negatively impacts Hawaiians because it remembers a painful history through its ties to Captain Cook Coffee Company and Captain Cook himself. The history reveals that Captain Cook Coffee Company profited heavily from failing to pay local farmers fair wages. Although the company dissolved in the 1950s (KHS, 2020), the area being named ‘Captain Cook’ remembers a time when locals were abused by a British-owned company for monetary gain. Further, since the company was named after Captain Cook, this name also remembers the painful history of Cook himself.

Remembering Captain Cook’s history is painful because it draws attention to the devastating Hawaiian population loss. As detailed, Captain Cook’s arrival brought European venereal diseases that contributed to a steep population decline for Native Hawaiians. Although the Europeans did not intentionally kill these individuals, Cook wrote in well-documented accounts that he unsuccessfully tried to stop his men from interacting with native women to prevent infection spreading (Goo, 2015). This provides evidence that Captain Cook and his crew knew the inherent risks of spreading illnesses and therefore, they hold responsibility for such devastation. Situating this historical context with the area being named ‘Captain Cook’ demonstrates that this name remembers a time where thousands of Hawaiians lost their lives.

Whilst remembering a tragic time, the ‘Captain Cook’ name is also damaging as it celebrates a European narrative that erases Hawaiian history. Captain Cook’s time on Hawai’i is often celebrated as Cook “discovering” Hawai’i, but this false narrative ignores local Hawaiian history. Prior to Cook’s arrival, Hawaiian history was passed on orally through mo’olelo (oral histories) for centuries. However, scholars often view Hawaiian “time” as starting when Cook

arrived since his written journals first inscribed Hawaiian lives into the English historical record (Arista, n.d.). Therefore, this Eurocentric perspective overshadows the local Hawaiian history that came before Cook only glorifying the European discovery. This narrative is solidified through the ‘Captain Cook’ name as a local Hawaiian articulates:

The name gives the impression that Captain Cook discovered the Hawaiian Islands & that the history of Hawaii started when he came to the islands. This is not true & I believe that the Native people, my people, are kind of tired of having to live with a history that was written by others (TBK, 2014).

This demonstrates that the ‘Captain Cook’ name celebrates a Eurocentric history, ultimately erasing Hawaiian history before Cook and ignoring the true devastation that Cook and his crew knowingly caused. This results in a two-fold impact for local Hawaiians in which the name ‘Captain Cook’ reminds them of a painful history of lost ancestors while the popular narrative erases Hawaiian history spotlighting Cook’s “discovery” instead.

### **Hawaiians Protest to Restore the ‘Ka’awoloa’ Name**

Given the negative associations with the name ‘Captain Cook’, Hawaiians have actively protested to change the census-designated place name to the traditional ahupua’a name, Ka’awoloa. In a 1975 hearing before the Subcommittee on Indian Affairs, retired U.S. Army Colonel Arthur B. Chun advocated for this change. He proposed the question: “Why must we [Hawaiians] have the imperialism of another country taken on the districts on which the Hawaiians proudly lived and name to?” (Chun, 1975, p.305) to articulate what the ‘Captain Cook’ name means to him and fellow Hawaiians. Unfortunately, Chun’s efforts did not give rise to a name change, but it demonstrates that this formal advocacy work to restore the Ka’awoloa name has been around for decades.



In 2014, the organization “Take Back Ka’awaloa” started a petition to the Hawai’i County Council advocating to re-institute the Ka’awaloa name. They state that the Ka’awoloa name “is culturally, historically and geographically correct and appropriate” (2014) and that they plan to petition to the U.S. congress for official change. During its active period, the petition gained 1,137 supporters who share a common wish to have the name reflect traditional Hawaiian culture and honor their history. As one supporter states, “We deserve to have an address that reflects the cultural heritage and the historical and geographical integrity of this place” (2014). Despite such support, the petition is now closed and the “Take Back Ka’awoloa” group has not been active since 2014 (TBK, 2014). Although it is not clear what prevented further action from the group, their advocacy still illustrates that Hawaiians are deeply affected by the name ‘Captain Cook’. Further, they want their voices heard and history honored to restore the ‘Ka’awoloa’ name.

### **Conclusion**

Evaluating the history of the name ‘Captain Cook’ reveals that the disregard for the ahupua’a disturbs Hawaiians’ identity, remembers times when local Hawaiians were monetarily abused and tragically killed, and celebrates the false narrative of Cook’s “discovery”. At first glance, the name ‘Captain Cook’ may not appear so harmful. Yet, upon tracing its history – through the post office, Captain Cook Coffee Company, and Captain Cook – a harmful legacy is revealed. This legacy continues to negatively impact locals and they are calling for immediate attention to restore the rightful ‘Ka’awoloa’ name. A local Hawaiian describes that changing the name will “go a long ways in changing the perception of Hawaiians - our language, culture, and nation as extinct - a people who no longer exist. We exist, we are the descendants” (TBK, 2014). It is long overdue, but the descendants deserve to be listened to. I urge you to stand in solidarity with native Hawaiians to “Take Back Ka’awoloa”. This name change is required to counteract the

glorified colonial narrative and instead honor Hawaiian history and support Hawaiian identity.

**Word Count:** 2760

### **Paragraph Explaining Revisions**

To revise my connect and reflect, I harnessed the feedback from my peers and the teaching team to polish my paper. I first began with moving my roadmap paragraph up and putting the ahupua'a naming system information afterwards which helps orient readers to the broader topic of the paper before diving into the paper's context. Next, I followed Dr. Brinkley's reverse outlining technique and found that there was a gap in my topic sentence structure between the "The Root: Captain Cook Coffee Company and Mail" section and the "Looking Deeper: Captain Cook" section. This left some of my argument flow unclear, so I revised this by adding a new topic sentence to the first paragraph in the "Looking Deeper: Captain Cook" section. I feel this also helped address the peer feedback that there was a slight disconnect in the narrative between these two sections. Although my peer indicated that the switch in chronological narrative may cause disconnect, this switch is the strongest flow for my paper and the new topic sentence helps provide clarity for this switch in timeline structure. Moreover, this outlining led to a call to action for readers (which addresses another point of feedback from Dr. B) that I placed at the very end; it encourages readers to support the native Hawaiian protest to "Take Back Ka'awola". Lastly, I intertwined more pre-colonial history within my first paragraph to highlight the pre-colonial relationship between native Hawaiians and their ahupua'a to provide more context for the importance of the name.

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