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RUMORS AND THE LANGUAGE OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY HAWAII

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In the first months of 1831, a pair of rumors ripped through Honolulu and Lahaina, the two major port towns of the Hawaiian Kingdom, and from there rippled outward to distant islands and districts. The first of these surfaced in February, and although elements of it would change in the ensuing months, it contained a consistent message: Liliha, wife of Boki, late governor of Oahu, was preparing a revolt against Kaahumanu, who was serving as *kuhina nui* (regent) of the Islands until Kauikeaouli (Kamehameha III) came of age. The reports reached these two most powerful members of the Hawaiian royalty while they were conducting a tour of the windward islands, traveling with a host of high-ranking chiefs and American Protestant missionaries. Not only did they hear that Liliha would oppose the entourage's return to Oahu but that the opposition she and her conspirators would offer would indeed be bloody; she was said to have declared that "there will be no peace until the heads of Kaahumanu and Mr. Bingham are taken off."¹

Hiram Bingham, one of the pioneer missionaries to the Islands and a close ally of Kaahumanu's, was also the target of that spring's second rumor. This one was not born of an islander-led revolt, but seemed to emerge from among disgruntled foreign residents in Honolulu; they at least helped to circulate it during the second week of April 1831. In this one, Bingham's fate was described in only slightly less gruesome terms: It was widely reported that he might be assassinated, though how and

by whom was not as clear as it had been with the earlier rumor. Still, one story whispered around the town had it that “foreigners were going in a body to drag him out & kill him.”²

How does one account for these rumors, for their violent language and dire predictions for social change? In part one’s tendency is to discount them. After all, neither deadly end came to pass. Liliha’s revolt was defused—her high-ranking father, Hoapili, asked her to make amends with the regency and she did so peacefully—her troops were scattered, and the threats against Kaahumanu, Bingham, and others consequently evaporated. The second rumor and its threat also dissipated, though its demise is complicated by the fact that both Bingham, on whose death it centered, and the foreign residents, who allegedly plotted his death, repeatedly denied the rumor’s very reality! The foreign residents, for example, claimed that it was Bingham who first gave voice to the rumor, by speaking of it from his pulpit, a charge Bingham and his parishioners stoutly refuted. Other members of the American missionary community indicated that they had first heard of the plot when Stephen Reynolds, an American merchant, came to Bingham’s home to verify whether the missionary had mentioned his impending assassination in his Sunday sermon. It is not clear, therefore, that the rumor even existed except through its denial.³

Assessing the importance of these two rumors is made trickier still when one turns to Bingham’s later account of them. The striking thing is the lack of discussion of these threats to his life in his semiautobiographical *A Residence of Twenty-One Years in the Sandwich Islands* (1849). Only if one knows of their existence does his brief comment—“the life of some of the missionaries was threatened . . . [but my] peculiar circumstances and relations, at this period, may be passed chiefly in silence”—suggest that something happened that spring, but presumably it was of comparatively minor importance, to judge from the emphasis he would give to other life-threatening incidents recorded in his book. He spilled a lot of ink, for instance, on three such events: In 1827 the Binghams visited the William Richards family at its mission at Lahaina, and the two families had to flee to the cellar to escape cannonballs fired at the compound by an enraged British whaling captain; one year earlier a foreign resident had burst into the Binghams’ home in Honolulu, seeking to cane some sense into the missionary; and in that same year a group of club-wielding sailors surrounded him, while another of their number threatened to disembowel him with a knife. Why did these incidents receive extensive coverage when the rumors were ignored? The difference in reporting may be due to the palpable nature of the

threats—it is hard to ignore cannonballs, canes, and knives. The rumors, on the other hand, were but words.⁴

And why should Bingham not dismiss these rumors as simply talk, the kind of talk that forever engaged those who lived in the nineteenth-century port communities of the Pacific? Robert Louis Stevenson, for one, loved this element of life in Samoa in the latter part of the century. “I never saw a place so good as [Apia],” he chortled. “You can be in a new conspiracy every day.” Such conspiracies, by his definition, were short term and good fun, adding color to an otherwise drab—and insular—existence. Honolulu was no different. It was a veritable rumor mill, according to David Gregg, United States commissioner to the Hawaiian Islands in the 1850s. “Scandal may have its fill in this town. There is no place like it in the wide world.” The 1831 rumors have that feel of delicious scandal, made all the more so by the fact that they were of short duration and (apparently) of little consequence.⁵

But the very commonness of rumors in Honolulu—in Gregg’s shocked tone, “no place is so bad in the countenance it gives to slander”—should make us pause before dismissing this pair out of hand. They might have served an important social and psychological function in island life, and to begin to understand what roles they may have played, we need first to assess these rumors as rumors. But to ask what a rumor is perforce raises another set of difficulties, for rumors by their very nature are slippery to handle and tricky to analyze. Usually dependent on oral communication and the vagaries of human memory for existence, they tend to undergo considerable permutations before dying out. For this reason rumors seem to leave behind little trace of their path and of the significance they may have held for those who created or spread or responded to them. Rumors, it would seem, have little history and are thus of little value to historians.⁶

Although ephemeral, rumors can nonetheless cut a swath through a community and damage social relations, as Liliha, Bingham, Kaahumanu, and others found out. That at least is how scholars frequently characterize them, as signs of chaos and disarray. On one level, then, rumors seem simple distortions of reality that can confuse those who participate in them and might lead people to act irresponsibly or irrationally as a consequence. Shakespeare captured this disquieting connection between rumor and subsequent behavior in the induction to *King Henry the Fourth, Part Two*: “from Rumour’s tongues / They bring smooth comforts false, worse than true wrongs.”⁷

That rumors play false with human sensibilities is not an observation unique to Shakespearean imagery and imagination. Such is often

asserted as well in scholarly studies of the American and French revolutions, and indeed forms a key to analyses of the mob violence that played such an important role in the timing and character of those eighteenth-century political upheavals. The connection has also been made as a means by which to grapple with the voluminous number of anti-German and anti-Japanese rumors unleashed in the United States during the early days of World War II, rumors that have been tied to repressive legislation concerning German and Japanese immigrants then living in the United States. Rumors can be perfidious things, as the ancient Roman world understood. The “swiftest traveller of all the ills on earth,” rumor gleefully announces “fact and fiction indiscriminately,” Virgil wrote in the *Aeneid*, becoming in the process “a winged angel of ruin.”⁸

Their destructive capacity notwithstanding, rumors might take on a different cast if one interprets them as a form of social communication, as a language that gives shape and meaning to human behavior. If so, then the nature and significance of rumors are altered both for those who participate in them and for those who later study that participation. For the former, rumors may in fact clarify (rather than confuse) social relations; they may reveal, for instance, antagonisms and animosities that will enable the participants to gauge more effectively where they stand in a given setting (and act appropriately.) As Raymond Firth observed in his study of rumor on Tikopia, one of the Solomon Islands, rumors can play a “positive” role: “not simply the product of idle curiosity or fantasy, [they can] serve as a social instrument, helping groups or individuals to achieve their ends.” Terry Ann Knopf extends this interpretation: A rumor, she writes, is a “social phenomenon arising out of group conflict,” a phenomenon that requires a flexible analytical approach. She suggests that the origin of a rumor (and the multiplicity of its meanings) can best be located by an intense focus on the social context in which it was produced, that is, on the manifold ways that people give order to their lives. When viewed in this light, rumors can become “facts” that historians and other scholars can “read” like any other historical document in search of clues to the complex character of human behavior in the past.⁹

This perspective is especially helpful in analyzing the significance of the pair of rumors that burst forth in Hawaii during the spring of 1831. Hiram Bingham, for example, understandably personalized what he called these “scarish things,” seeing them as a consequence of his missionary labors. As he later observed in a letter to the Reverend Rufus Anderson, corresponding secretary of the American Board of Commis-

sioners for Foreign Missions (ABC FM), the rumors were a reflection of “the present struggle in which we are engaged . . . [and] will speak volumes of the nature of our work.” Indeed that is true to a degree, and a close assessment of these two rumors will help locate some of the sources of his political and religious influence on Hawaiian affairs.¹⁰

But Bingham’s vantage point can only take us so far in explaining the generation, spread, and ultimate demise of these rumors. It becomes quickly apparent, for instance, that his actions as a Protestant missionary played but a small role in their creation. Instead, to understand them fully one must probe the wider context in which they were nourished and disseminated. That probe in turn suggests that this was an especially turbulent period in Hawaiian history, one in which the relations amongst the Hawaiians themselves, chiefly and nonchiefly, and between the Hawaiian royalty, American missionaries, and foreign residents were undergoing fundamental transformations. And that these rumors enable us to illuminate the social change of this period further testifies to their value as historical sources, for they served to articulate an ongoing dialogue between the various elements of Hawaiian society. It was on the basis of this conversation that the royalty, missionaries, and members of the foreign resident community developed a language that gave purpose to their behavior and helped make sense of the world around them, a world they hoped to change.

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Not everyone could comprehend the whole of the conversation, of course. Maria Ward, a missionary teacher stationed at Kailua, Hawaii island, heard the confusing reports about Liliha’s intentions (and those of her co-conspirators) and happily decided that the revolt, which seemed to lack cause, also lacked purpose and direction. “Who they are going to fight or what they [are] calculating to do is probably more than they know themselves,” she concluded.¹¹

Ward could not have been more wrong. For instance, the origins of the rumored revolt are quite clear. The immediate source lay in yet another “report,” this one originating from the island of Hawaii in January 1831. There, during a meeting between high-ranking chiefs, Kaahumanu, and Kauikeaouli—a meeting from which Liliha was purposefully excluded—it was allegedly decided that Liliha would be compelled to forfeit her tenuous claim to the governorship of Oahu. Boki had conferred the post upon her prior to his departure from the Islands in 1829; he had sailed to Melanesia, heading for the island of Ero-

manga in search of fragrant sandalwood, the discovery of which would have relieved him of his massive debt to Western merchants; he had apparently died in the attempt. Liliha would not be removed so conveniently, however, and the rumors about her decision to remain at her post could be seen simply as part of her effort to maintain the legitimacy of her position and status, and to communicate her displeasure to those arrayed against her.¹²

Nothing is ever so simple in the combative arena of Hawaiian politics, however. The chiefs' action, and Liliha's reaction, did not depend just on Boki's departure and subsequent death. Instead, they were predicated on a decade-long struggle in which Boki, Liliha, and their supporters had continuously clashed with those chiefs, including Kaahumanu, who were now in 1831 trying to drive Liliha from office.

The key to this struggle lay in the Hawaiian royalty's effort to refashion the nature of political power, one that Kamehameha I had set into motion in the late eighteenth century. Traditionally, political legitimacy for the *ali'i* (high chiefs) had depended on one's rank at birth, familial lineage, and birth order; it was usually through such means, for example, that a son obtained his father's lands. This status could be enhanced through marriage, military prowess, and shrewd diplomacy, something the *ali'i nui* (highest of chiefs) accomplished, enabling them to trace their ancestry and *mana* (spirit; power) to the most powerful gods. Jealous of one another's prerogatives, none of the *ali'i nui* was able to conquer the whole of the archipelago, for the rise of one led the others to band together in opposition.¹³

Such internecine strife marked Kamehameha's attempt to conquer the various islands, but he succeeded where all others before him had failed, largely due to his military genius that combined traditional forms of warfare with the new technologies—guns and cannons—brought by Western explorers. To insure the maintenance of his authority across time, Kamehameha I established a new political form of authority that would transcend time, lineal succession—a concept that necessarily shattered the traditional cultural constructs of rank and ancestry. When Kamehameha unified the Hawaiian archipelago under his sole authority, a union that came into effect in 1810, he had refashioned himself from a local Hawaii-island chief into the paramount chief of the islands.¹⁴

What was good for Kamehameha was not necessarily good for the future course of Hawaiian politics. At the very least his actions created difficulties that emerged when Kamehameha I died in 1819, and his son Liholiho succeeded him. The son's first (and only) major act as king,

one in which he followed the lead of others, was to destroy further the traditional order his father had already severely disrupted. Under pressure from Kaahumanu, who had been one of his father's favorite wives, the newly-crowned Kamehameha II defied the *kapu* system, which had prescribed social relations between the social classes and between the people and their gods; he further ordered the destruction of religious symbols and temples, thereby directly challenging priestly authority. In a relatively short period of time, then, the first two Kamehamehas had generated a social upheaval of no little significance.¹⁵

Its significance would become clear in 1824, when Liholiho died while on a visit to England, leaving as political heir a brother, Kauikeaouli, as yet a minor. Until he came of age, Kaahumanu, as *kuhina nui*, would rule the island nation. And although her authority had been precisely laid out in Liholiho's will, and her status and rank high, her regency (1823-1832) was nonetheless constantly challenged, a measure of the political instability and religious vacuum that were the Kamehamehas' legacy. These challenges cut along kinship lines, as Caroline Ralston has shown. Kamehameha I's collateral kin, including Liliha, found themselves shut out of the more important posts in the Hawaiian government; in their place stood Kamehameha's affinal Maui relations, of which Kaahumanu was head. One step she and her Maui kin took to further consolidate their power was to convert to Christianity, the first profession of which was made in June 1825, within a month of Liholiho's funeral. The timing was not coincidental. The conversion of some of the highest-ranking *ali'i* had everything to do with their effort to bolster their political control, to locate an alternate source of authority, during a time of uncertainty. Six months later, after formal baptism administered by Hiram Bingham and other American missionaries, the converts adopted the Decalogue as the law of the land, introducing a new (and Christian) system of *kapu*.¹⁶

Resistance to the new order was swift, at the center of which stood Boki and Liliha, who could lose much with its implementation. For them, this must have been an inflammatory shift, as they had been closely associated with Liholiho and his wife, Kamamalu. They had journeyed with the king and queen to England, had managed to escape the measles epidemic that carried off the two Hawaiian regents, and had returned with the bodies for burial. Prior to their departure from England George IV reportedly advised the grieving Hawaiians to take seriously the word of the Christian god, a message they relayed to Kaahumanu upon their return, and one she seized upon to justify in part her decision to convert. The messengers in this case bore the brunt

of that conversion, for as Kaahumanu, the Christian chiefs, and their missionary allies sought to codify Christian mores and eliminate vice—including the desecration of the sabbath, the sale of alcohol, gambling, and prostitution—they challenged Boki's very economic existence; as governor of Oahu he sold the licenses for grog shops; as an entrepreneur, he owned billiards halls and other gaming houses. These activities, and by extension Boki's political authority, were consequently threatened, leading him and Liliha, together with other afflicted merchants, traders, and foreign residents, to test (and contest) Kaahumanu's ability to determine social affairs in Honolulu and elsewhere. Known as "the moral wars," these battles raged throughout the 1820s and periodically drew in officers and crews of visiting whalers, and those of the navies of Britain, France, and the United States cruising the northern Pacific. And when Roman Catholic missionaries arrived in Hawaii in the late 1820s, Boki and his allies immediately became their unofficial sponsors, using these prelates to challenge Kaahumanu's development of a Protestant theocratic state.¹⁷

It was in the midst of one such battle that Boki, learning of a hitherto untapped supply of sandalwood on Erromanga, sailed from Honolulu, never to return. And it was the longstanding struggle with Kaahumanu that two years later, in 1831, led Liliha to begin to call for troops from Boki's district of Waianae and quarter them in the fort at Honolulu and in the battery at Punchbowl, the better to defend her claims to the governorship of Oahu. There would be great speculation as to the number of troops—some said ninety, others five hundred, and still other sources claimed one thousand—exaggerated claims that led contemporaries and later historians to discount the seriousness of Liliha's intentions. However many troops there were rumored to be, one thing is clear: Their presence was a calculated and understandable reaction to recent political events.¹⁸

Liliha's choice of alleged targets for decapitation was understandable, too, in light of the immediate past. Indeed, from her perspective there were no better candidates for execution than Kaahumanu and Hiram Bingham. The former at once symbolized and had deftly exploited the social change that so altered Hawaiian society since the late eighteenth century, alterations that were particularly evident in the lives of *ali'i* such as Boki and Liliha; they, after all, were collateral kin of the Kamehamehas, and felt their loss keenly. And Bingham, of course, was the most visible instrument of Kaahumanu and her allies. Stationed in Honolulu, now the seat of national government, and holder of the prized missionary pulpit at Kawaiahae, he was well situated to provide

the *kuhina nui* with a new god and a new system of religious symbols and social control that so effectively hemmed in its opponents. Given this, Liliha's was a rational, if bloody, course.¹⁹

Had these two been eliminated, then the political resolution for which Liliha (and Boki) had long yearned might have occurred. As Bingham understood, Liliha had to sever the relation between Kaahumanu and her charge, Kauikeaouli, to succeed: "I can hardly suppose that there's so much madness in the *kue* [opposition] party as to venture on a war without being able to have the king, at least in appearance, on their side." And Liliha was not crazy, for she knew she already had Kauikeaouli's allegiance. One of the many stories circulating in Honolulu in mid-March 1831 suggested how this allegiance would be manifested publicly. When the king and the *ali'i* returned from their extended tour of the windward islands to Honolulu later that month, the king would be escorted ashore first. Liliha and her supporters would then "get him into their circle and gain his assent to their plan." Once he had thrown in his lot with Liliha, a signal would be given and the Christian chiefs and missionaries who remained on board would be attacked and presumably killed.²⁰

This was not only a shrewd bit of strategy—had it been successful Liliha would have wiped out those who had opposed her and inextricably linked her future with that of the king—but it may have received some encouragement from Kauikeaouli himself. Maria Ward, for example, heard that he had written to Richard Charlton, British consul to the Islands, "stating his dissatisfaction with the proceedings of the chiefs respecting Liliha," dissatisfaction that Charlton, an opportunist of the first order, would have readily passed on to Liliha. Although Ward qualified her report—"whether there is a word of truth in it is more than I know"—the king's reaction to the revolt's failure gives it credence.²¹

In March, after being dissuaded from revolt by her father, Liliha sailed to Lahaina on Maui, there to be reconciled with Kaahumanu and the other high chiefs. Her reception from the king was particularly striking: He seemed "greatly affected" by her arrival, so much so "that he seated himself in her lap & wept greatly," a submissiveness that angered the *ali'i* gathered nearby; one was so offended that he hauled the king off! The missionaries also sensed the political import of his act, of his tears. "We cannot but feel moved with the disposition of the king, manifested towards such a person and under such circumstances," Levi Chamberlain would write in his journal. And yet "in view of it [we] are constrained to look upon the movements of the Governess here as some-

thing which would have met with the King's cooperation. . . ." At the very least, the rumors of Liliha's revolt spoke to (and for) Kauikeaouli's own ambivalence about the direction that the Christian chiefs were taking the Hawaiian kingdom. Stephen Reynolds offered a suggestive comment in this regard. When told by a missionary that in any other country Liliha would "have been HUNG for her rebellion against the King," the American merchant retorted, "I wish to know what her rebellion was. She was put into office by the King. She supported his side." From Reynolds's point of view, Liliha was doing for Kauikeaouli what he could not do for himself.²²

To forestall Liliha's acting on his behalf, Kaahumanu ma (and her followers) moved swiftly to assert and reestablish their authority. Concerned by Kauikeaouli's emotional embrace of Liliha, by his evident (and dangerous) vacillation, and convinced that she had in fact intended to revolt, despite her protestations to the contrary—the rumors, she said, were "*wahahee loa*" (exceedingly deceitful)—they stripped her of her offices, redistributing these and her land holdings to more demonstrably loyal *ali'i*. Some of her supporters suffered the same fate (among them Nahienaena, Kauikeaouli's sister), retribution that revealed how effective the new form of sovereignty, against which she and her collaborators had protested, could be. In the end, the Christian chiefs' reactions to Liliha had been as precise and as calculated as had been her threats, real or imagined.²³

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Not all rumors so neatly illuminate social tension or give us access to the language in which that tension is addressed (and resolved). At first glance, the second (and parallel) rumor that bedeviled Honolulu in the spring of 1831 would seem to fall into that category. Compared to those rumors that encircled Liliha, for example, the one surrounding the assassination of Hiram Bingham was of short duration; hers had lasted more than a month and a half; his survived less than a week. The threat it posed was also more narrowly focused, on one individual, and consequently drew in only the affected parties, specifically the foreign resident population, missionary and merchant alike. True, Kaahumanu expressed a "lively interest" in the affair to Bingham, but that interest was considerably less lively, less pronounced than it had been when she and her government had been directly threatened a few short weeks earlier.²⁴

Furthermore, the language itself of this later rumor seemed con-

strained and without broad significance. Basically the rumor centered on a heated exchange of letters between Bingham and a group of American merchants, including Stephen Reynolds, William French, Henry Pierce, and the United States agent for commerce and seamen, John Coffin Jones. Each side accused the other of giving voice to the rumor of an assassination attempt on Bingham, and each took the accusation seriously, as the sheer number of exchanges attests. Bingham saved every one of the twenty-one notes, accusations and countercharges, and when he reproduced them in a letter to his superiors at the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in Boston, the letter ran more than fifty pages! It is not immediately obvious, however, after poring over this voluminous and excited correspondence, why the two parties expended so much effort. Indeed, the whole seems to devolve into a question of semantics, as each side sought to prove that the other had been the first to discuss Bingham's death, proof gleaned from what the opposition said or wrote or did not say or did not write.²⁵

Illustrative of this is the recounting of a meeting between Bingham and Reynolds on the evening of April 6, fittingly a dark and rainy night. In his journal, Reynolds noted that he visited the Bingham's mission compound personally to ascertain two things. First, he wanted to determine whether Dr. T. C. B. Rooke, an English physician, had been the one to tell Bingham that "the foreign residents were going in a body to drag [Bingham] out and kill him." His second motive was to learn whether Bingham had mentioned the report, and Rooke's association with it, from his pulpit during afternoon services, as one islander source had indicated. He did not get the answers he was seeking. Sybil Bingham, whom he queried first, had not heard of the rumor and said her husband "could answer for himself," but apparently Hiram Bingham did not do so: According to Reynolds's journal, the missionary twice failed to reply to a question about his knowledge of the rumor; "every one must make his own inferences" from the missionary's silence, Reynolds concluded ominously.²⁶

Bingham's account of the visit and conversation with Reynolds, captured in the letter he wrote to Boston several months later, is quite different. Upon arriving at the missionary's abode, Reynolds handed Bingham "a curious note, signed by himself and three other American merchants including the American Consul." The merchants' letter noted a rumor was circulating in Honolulu that Bingham had been informed "the principal residents in this place have conspired against your life"; its authors wanted "an explicit answer if it be the fact or no." Uncertain as to the letter's "real design," suspecting that the rumor was

a “mere trick,” Bingham nonetheless composed a one-sentence reply: “I can state that I have not ‘been told that the principal residents have conspired against my life.’ ”²⁷

Believing that he had provided the explicit denial the merchants requested, Bingham was surprised to learn the next day from a third party, Dr. Rooke himself, that J. C. Jones had asserted that Bingham had in fact confirmed the rumor and Rooke’s dissemination of it. From that misinterpretation on, things seemed to have spun out of control, as each side spent the next two days and nights firing off missives accusing the other of evasiveness, letters that engendered equally heated rebuttals that carried countercharges of equivocation. Typical of these was Reynolds’s observation in his journal for April 9: “Mr. Bingham wrote me a letter in answer to one from me last evening in which he made some . . . twistings and turnings if not falsehoods.” Each day the letters grew in length as the combatants, armed with selected portions of the previous day’s exchanges, incorporated this evidence in the next salvo. It was an all-consuming affair. In the understated language of missionary Levi Chamberlain: “It is very certain that no small excitement exists in the village.” But after the three-day barrage, which left Bingham and the merchants exhausted, the strongest words Chamberlain could muster about its net result were that “it was not improbable that threats have been made touching the life of Mr. Bingham,” a conclusion even “Mr. Reynolds thought not unlikely.” With that, the letters ceased flowing, and the rumor of the missionary’s imminent demise disappeared.²⁸

One way to interpret this material is as Harold Bradley did in his *The American Frontier in Hawaii* (1942). He dismissed the episode, declaring it “more ridiculous than reasonable.” The correspondents, he noted, failed to make a “serious effort to obtain an amicable solution of the problems which vexed the community” and instead indulged in an “acrimonious exchange of letters [that] served chiefly to confirm the correspondents in the views which each already held.” The power of confirmation was of but pedestrian value.²⁹

That confirmation, though, is exactly why these letters should not be dismissed, why they are so important. Because they in fact confirm positions and postures that the merchants and missionaries adopted toward one another, they can give us much-needed insight into the texture of the often-contentious relationship. This is particularly important, for that relationship was undergoing a radical change in an environment still reeling from the implications of and reverberations from Liliha’s revolt. Rather than avoiding the serious problems facing con-

temporary Hawaiian society, as Bradley supposes, the rumor (and the letters it spawned) directly confronts and comments upon them.

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The proximate cause of the rumor was a public meeting held on 1 April 1831, which all residents of Honolulu—chiefs and *makaainana* (commoners), merchants and missionaries—were required to attend. The purpose was to inform those who gathered before the king's house about recent decisions the chiefs had reached about the future governance of Honolulu in particular and Oahu in general. The meeting was held at Kauikeaouli's house, but everything about it bore the mark of Kaahumanu. It was she who had commanded all to attend, she who stood at center stage, flanked by armed guards. And when Kauikeaouli "called for the attention of the people" and the audience grew silent, he immediately deferred to the regent, pointed to her and "said she would communicate his mind." In fact she communicated her own mind, and that of the council of chiefs, as her announcement makes plain, an announcement that in each of its particulars indicated that the foreign merchants' position in Hawaiian affairs was under assault.³⁰

The first declaration was the pivot on which all else turned. Because of the disappearance of Boki (*nalowale ka kiaaina* [lost governor]), the king now took full possession of the island of Oahu, together with Honolulu and its two forts, Kaahumanu declared, possession of which he then passed on to her. She in turn appointed her brother Kuakini governor of the island, a post he would hold concurrently with his governorship of the island of Hawaii. This formal transfer of power further solidified Kaahumanu's political control and did not bode well for those foreign residents who had sided with Boki and Liliha, a presentiment of which emerged in her more informal address to the assembled throng. In it she called upon "all classes to attend and obey to the law of God," for such service would promote "prosperity, peace and happiness" for all, making the kingdom itself "stable and prosperous."³¹

Kaahumanu had an odd idea of what promoted stability and prosperity. No sooner had she taken her seat than the newly appointed governor of Oahu arose, walked to where the foreign merchants were seated, and declared war: Henceforth the sale and distribution of spirituous liquors would cease, grog-shop licenses would no longer be sold, gambling was prohibited, and the sabbath would become a holy (and quiet) day. Kuakini made it abundantly clear that he would not act as

had Boki, who ran interference for the merchants and failed to enforce governmental edicts designed to restrict public and private behavior. Those who flouted the law under his administration, Kuakini announced, would have their property seized and, if they continued to resist, their homes would be razed. The Christian chiefs' perspective now reigned supreme.³²

That supremacy would be tested. The chiefs' tough stance provoked the foreign merchants and for many weeks thereafter they clashed with Kuakini's soldiers over the operation of billiards halls, fought in the streets over wine casks, and in those same streets on Sunday mornings would battle over the right to ride their horses, said to be a desecration of the sabbath. Although neither side could claim outright victory in these engagements—Kuakini may have had the upper hand—neither were they exercises in futility. Instead they reflect the significant shift in authority that the April 1 meeting proclaimed, the contours of which both groups sought to probe. The Hawaiian Christians, now rid of Boki and Liliha, were determining how far they could extend their sovereignty and how fully they could unify the various island peoples around the new codes, actions they took without soliciting the opinion of the foreign merchants. That by itself is important, for those merchants had once heavily influenced the council of chiefs through Boki and Liliha. The street fighting following the meeting, then, testified as much to the rise of the Christian chiefs as to the decline of the merchants' abilities to shape public policy.³³

Further testimony to this alteration in the foreigners' fortunes was the rumor of an assassination plot against Bingham that emerged, significantly enough, right in the midst of the street battles between the beach community and Kuakini. Indeed, the two were inextricably linked, for the rumor's first appearance can be traced to a meeting on Wednesday, April 6, at the Oahu Hotel of those J. C. Jones liked to call "the principal residents." They had assembled there, in the words of Stephen Reynolds, "to take into consideration the best method to represent to the government their views of the latest outrage. . . ." It was while engaged in writing a petition, in which they expressed alarm at and sought redress for "the encroachments made on our *liberties, religion, and amusements*," that the report that Bingham would be assassinated first surfaced.³⁴

Why was Bingham singled out? Why were not Kuakini and Kaahumanu included in the death threat? The reason, in part, may be because the resident merchants believed that Bingham had orchestrated the implementation of the new laws, that the governor and the regent were

merely his mouthpieces. Reynolds in particular was convinced of this arrangement: "Report in circulation that Mr. Bingham wrote Gov. Adams [Kuakini] a letter last evening [March 31, the night before the new laws were publicly pronounced] saying he must not give the licenses—nor show his letter to any of 'our enemies.' The hypocrite dare not show himself before men."³⁵

It is, of course, a convenient rumor that contains within it an assertion that no solid evidence of its truth will be forthcoming. Bingham moreover was in fact open about his involvement and encouragement of the changes. As he later boasted, "the clear, decisive and healthful tones of the pulpit throughout the islands, and the special favor of God, strengthened and cheered on the native friends of sobriety, morality and piety." But it was just as clear that these so-called native friends—the Hawaiian Christian chiefs—had their own, indigenous reasons for championing temperance; they derived profound benefits from the new codes, benefits that are not only especially meaningful from a Hawaiian perspective, but that also help explain why Bingham and not the chiefs was the rumor's subject.³⁶

In this regard Kaahumanu's efforts "to make God's law the foundation of the law of the country," as a recent biographer of the regent puts it, are instructive. The significance of the April 1 meeting, Jane Silverman argues, is that Kaahumanu essentially returned religion "to the center of law and chiefly power" after a hiatus of twelve years, a reintegration that had far-reaching consequences. During the last stages of her regency, for instance, she "reincorporated religion, with herself the primary motivator, again at the center of authority, as delineator of law and of *hewa* [sin]." Even if outsiders such as the foreign residents (including Bingham) did not recognize the way in which she refashioned Christianity to suit her Hawaiian ends, there was no mistaking her centrality. That centrality made it difficult for the merchants to threaten her, too. They had witnessed what had happened to Liliha and knew well the costs involved when one lacked the protection of the high chiefs.³⁷

This situation supplied all the more reason to focus their animus on Hiram Bingham, albeit in the cautious and indirect fashion of a rumor. They could no longer confront him as directly as they had in the 1820s, when Reynolds, Jones, and any number of visiting captains had periodically threatened to bloody his nose, pummel him to the ground, or string him up from the nearest yardarm. Then, Governor Boki had held sway over Oahu and Honolulu, and Bingham was in the challenger's position, making him a more acceptably confrontable target. That situ-

ation had changed, however, as the events of spring 1831 show. Now Bingham was an important player on the winning side, a turn of fortune that generated frustration and anger on the part of his antagonists, feelings that, due to the changed context, must be vented in a different, less confrontational manner. The very resort to rumor, in short, reveals an important evolution in Honolulu's social hierarchy.³⁸

The rumor is also an accurate gauge of another element in the evolving texture of Honolulu society. It gives, for example, a sensitive reading of the inner workings of the merchant community itself, a group of men who were now in somewhat straightened circumstances. They faced a series of external challenges to their economic endeavors and political power, not to say their physical safety. They would meet these challenges in a variety of ways, and in time would secure the king's favor. But Kauikeaouli did not openly join them until after he placed most of his royal responsibilities fully in the hands of the Christian chiefs in 1833, a move that correspondingly reduced the political import of his favor.³⁹

The turmoil the rumor produced also instigated an important internal challenge as well, one to group identity and cohesiveness. The principal figure in this aspect of the crisis was Doctor T. C. B. Rooke. He would later gain status in Hawaiian society and a place in history in two ways. The first was his marriage to Grace Kamaikui Young, daughter of Kamehameha I's close friend John Young and granddaughter of Keliimaiki, full brother of the great Kamehameha. The second was through the couple's adoption of Grace's niece, Emma (born Kalanikaumakeamano), who would later become the wife of Kamehameha IV. Those royal connections lay in the future, however. Rooke's present, as of 1831, was considerably less regal (or stable).⁴⁰

A relative newcomer to the islands—he "has been practicing physic in this place about two years," Bingham noted at the time—Rooke had arrived in Honolulu during one of the most tumultuous periods in Hawaiian political life. It was not the best moment to commence a medical practice, especially for an Englishman (and an Anglican) seeking to make his way in a community of foreign residents increasingly dominated by Yankees (and Congregationalists). That he was able to do so was due in large part to his willingness and ability "to keep on good terms with all parties," Bingham thought.⁴¹

Even in the best of times establishing and holding such a middle ground must have been fraught with difficulties. It could only have become a more intensely complicated task when, on Wednesday, April 6, a committee of American merchants led by U.S. Consul J. C. Jones

accused Rooke of spreading the report that Bingham would be assassinated and of naming names, an accusation that perforce threatened to sunder his ties to these men and to undermine his strategy of neutrality. But then that was part of the point of the rumor, or at least of his association with it. Through it the merchants, consciously or otherwise, were testing Rooke's stance in the current struggle, endeavoring to force a clear distinction between those who supported and opposed them, something that Bingham also sought to distinguish in his conversations and correspondence with the English physician.⁴²

The incident began innocently enough. On Wednesday morning Rooke called at Bingham's home in what the missionary thought was an "agitated state." The previous evening he had witnessed a battle royal between Hawaiian soldiers and foreign residents in a billiards hall, and came to urge Bingham to use his influence with the Christian chiefs to slow down their punitive raids, to instruct them in "the differences between gambling and playing for amusement." If things continued as they were, Rooke predicted, blood would again flow, probably initiated by what he called "the lower class" of residents. Wishing "to feel the pulse of the doctor, as well as he mine," Bingham asked his visitor whether "there is influence enough in the higher class of residents to keep down the lower class, should they be disposed to raise a mob to do mischief." Rooke replied negatively: "They would not if they could. They are all exasperated—all classes are crossed in some way . . . the grog shop keepers are disappointed in their gains, and others are interrupted in their pleasures." If things were in such a sorry state, the American missionary countered, then "it is time the chiefs knew what they were about," concluding that the "marbles had better lie still for the moment."⁴³

The die, it seemed, was cast. Even as Rooke sought to negotiate a compromise with Bingham, the missionary continued to prepare a handbill "for the people containing the general principles of abstinence," a document that would make compromise all the more difficult to achieve. It would be distributed later in the day at a massive rally of Hawaiians at Kawaiahao Church; all the leading chiefs and about a thousand *makaainana* would subscribe to the principles. The rally, a public demonstration of support for Kuakini's aggressive actions the night before, would only exacerbate matters. And as Bingham and Rooke's conversation continued, the white merchants were themselves gathering at Oahu Hotel to draw up angry resolutions to protest the enforcement of Kuakini's edicts. No one but Rooke was interested in compromise.⁴⁴

What brought matters to a head for Rooke was his notable absence from the latter, well-attended meeting. He had warned the women of the mission not to bother shopping that day as “the merchants have all left their shops to attend to this business,” and he suspected that his presence at the mission would cause problems, so he asked Bingham to keep his confidence. His suspicions had merit: He was at the wrong place at the wrong time. He had been seen at the Bingham house, and, as near as one can tell, that is what led to the rumor of his involvement in spreading the story in the first place.⁴⁵

The question Rooke’s fellow foreign residents had about him was not simply whether he had informed Bingham that they intended to assassinate him. That query was paired with what was apparently a somewhat more significant one of allegiance. When Reynolds visited Bingham that evening, for instance, he not only wanted to ascertain if Rooke had been the bearer of ill-tidings, but also whether Rooke was “the missionaries’ friend.” Reynolds was apparently unable to determine this from his conversation with the mission family, and it was at this point that he and the other residents exerted greater pressure on the doctor. Thursday morning Rooke received a summons from the American consul to appear before a “com[mittee] of gen[tlemen]” to explain his actions of the day before. The real thrust of the summons lay in its final sentences, however. Jones observed pointedly that Bingham had publicly and privately confirmed Rooke’s involvement in the spread of the rumor. “That Mr. Bingham has asserted the above can be proved; if false he should suffer for the consequences.” Jones’s prevarication was designed to separate Rooke from Bingham, to set the two against each other. The physician was then given an opportunity to clear his name with his peers, but in such a context that he would come to share their hostility towards the missionary.⁴⁶

Before Rooke met with the committee, and perhaps motivated by self-protection, he sent a copy of Jones’s summons to Bingham, indicating that he planned to testify as requested. Bingham recognized that Jones’s ploy was calculated “to prejudice [Rooke’s] mind against me,” and he immediately launched a two-pronged counterthrust. He dashed off a note to Rooke urging him to ignore the committee’s demand for an interview and assured him that Jones was lying: “I [have] no apprehension that any man or set of men could prove what Mr. J. asserted.” Bingham’s letter arrived too late, so, “hoping to check the process against Dr. Rooke founded on a false charge against me,” Bingham composed a stinging rebuke to Jones. “I call on you to take back the whole length and breadth of [the allegation], and without any unreasonable

delay.” If he did not, Bingham warned darkly, “I shall feel at liberty to complain of you for abuse both to the Government of the Sandwich Islands and to the Secretary of the Navy.”⁴⁷

The battle over Rooke was as tangled, and the tenor of its language as hostile, as the larger confrontation between the two contending factions. And it lasted as long. In the end, Rooke managed to do the seemingly impossible: He exculpated himself from the charge of informing on the other residents, which led Jones to send a smug note to Bingham to the effect that “with Doct. R. and all the gentlemen of the village all is at rest.” But so it was with Bingham, too. Although he sensed that the Englishman had been swayed to Jones’s side, he nonetheless wrote him that “I regard you with increasing confidence and esteem and hope our trials in which you and I seem to know how to sympathise, will do us good.” Flattery had supplanted acrimony.⁴⁸

The rumor, then, did not succeed in driving a wedge between Rooke and either of the two groups contending for his soul. But the larger point is not that he nimbly escaped a trap, but that a trap had been set, set to enforce a particular code of behavior and sense of allegiance at a time of collective stress. The whole affair, Bingham later observed without a hint of irony for his role in the protracted psychological tug-of-war, “shows in some small measure how difficult it appears to be for a young man here to maintain a dignified independence of mind and character.”⁴⁹

* * * *

As voices from the past, these two rumors from the spring of 1831 have much to offer. They provide, for instance, a close view of the inner dynamics of social relations on the islands. This is especially true of those between the three groups—the *ali'i*, foreign merchants, and American missionaries—who sought to determine the direction and degree of change in Hawaiian culture and society in the early nineteenth century. As an example, the various accounts of Liliha’s revolt indicate that her contemporaries took the rumors far more seriously than have historians, understanding the nature of her threat and its possible (and wide-ranging) repercussions for those she reportedly sought to destroy. It was on the basis of this understanding, after all, that Kaahumanu and the Christian chiefs immediately moved to undermine, if not cripple, those arrayed against them. Liliha was summarily deposed from office and denied access to sources of authority. Her allies in the merchant community were similarly confronted with a vengeful gov-

ernment; their political influence shrunk as rapidly as their income from the sale of alcohol.⁵⁰

By itself this rumor did not cause the chiefly leadership to initiate such sweeping reforms; they had been contemplated for some time. But it certainly intensified the debate and influenced the timing of the chiefs' actions. The rumor did so, moreover, by casting in sharp relief the differences between the competing visions for Hawaii's future, validating these differences as "facts," and then providing the language and imagery by which these disagreements could be expressed publicly.⁵¹

These circumstances suggest something else: that the events of the first months of 1831 were crucial to the growth of the supremacy of the council of chiefs, and with it of Kaahumanu's followers. Their place in the governance of Hawaii became so secure after this period that they easily weathered Kaahumanu's death the next year. And when Kauhikaouli then assumed the throne, and threatened to undo all that she had accomplished, they compelled him to relinquish most of his sovereign powers without a serious struggle. The present and future belonged to these chiefs, to their vision of politics and morality.⁵²

These months were no less critical to the parallel ascendance of the American missionaries, a rise attested to by the rumors of plots against the life of Bingham. In the ensuing years the mission would capitalize on its alliance with the council of chiefs, and the mission's presence and power would increase markedly. The Catholic missionaries, for example, were forcibly expelled from Hawaii in late 1831, an expulsion that the Protestant mission helped to engineer. Its own numbers rose rapidly during the 1830s and in time some of its members would resign to hold high-ranking posts in the Hawaiian government. This blend of politics and piety found further expression in 1839 when P. A. Brinsmade, a Congregationalist, replaced Jones, arch foe of the mission, as U.S. agent for commerce and seamen; Reynolds could only lament that the "mission villain will crow," Again the rumors did not by themselves cause this social transformation within the foreign resident population, but they helped construct the stage on which the contending forces would act it out.⁵³

Beyond these considerations, and in light of the historical context in which the rumors emerged, were nourished, and then evaporated, we can now more readily appreciate these rumors as forms of social discourse. Each contributed to the heightening of what Martin Luther King, Jr., called "creative tension," a healthy tension that can force a community to speak to, confront, and then resolve pressing, perhaps long-standing, social problems. In this respect the rumors were rational

responses to the world in which they came to life, a rationality that counters the pejorative connotations with which the word has long been freighted.⁵⁴

Even a rumor that seems hallucinatory, one beyond the realm of reason and possibility—and the two discussed here are not at that extreme—can communicate something important to its listeners and therefore to those who come upon it later in the historical record. Such is true for a third rumor that blossomed forth, only to wither and die, all within one day sometime in the late spring or early summer of 1831. On that day, a Hawaiian from Boki's old district of Waianae entered the port town in "great haste." He headed directly to Liliha's home, startling her with the news that her husband, presumed dead, was in fact alive. Alive and well armed, for according to this source, he had arrived with two vessels bristling with cannon, evidently hoping to foment a revolt: Upon landing, Boki allegedly "ordered that a profound silence be kept about his return until his partizans could be informed."⁵⁵

Things were not silent for long. After intense questioning of the informant, Liliha and her cohort were "persuaded of the truth of the story," and word traveled swiftly throughout Honolulu, electrifying the village. "The people were in an uproar, some frightened, some pleased," Hawaiian historian Samuel M. Kamakau recorded. Among the latter was Kauikeaouli who, as one observer noted, "forgot his dignity out of joy." Messengers by land and sea were dispatched to Waianae to welcome the once-mourned governor of Oahu. So many islanders and foreigners raced from town on horseback that "red dust rose in clouds from the plain of Kaiwi'ula." It was all for naught; the rumor had less substance than the dust clouds that billowed up into the sky. No ships were located. No one in Waianae could confirm the story of Boki's return. And the original messenger, once greeted with great joy, was now reviled: He was whipped through the streets of Honolulu for his transgression, for his ill-founded rumor.⁵⁶

Boki's return was, perhaps, a mere fantasy. That is how it was interpreted at the time, an interpretation that has shaped contemporary analysis as well. Father Alexis Bachelot, a Catholic priest then living in Honolulu, afterwards wrote that "the messenger of this startling report had simply taken a dream for reality." Historian Gavan Daws reached a similar conclusion. The islander had but dreamed of Boki's return, a particularly vivid dream that "was all a hallucination." Reality, Daws concluded, "had dealt Boki false to the last."⁵⁷

But it was not Boki who had been dealt false. After all, he was dead. Rather it was his wife and her supporters—including the king—who

had responded with such alacrity and enthusiasm to the news of his return. Why had they so quickly embraced the rumor? Why did it speak to them in the ways that it did? Why, in short, did they equate it with reality?

Part of the answer is that Boki's death had never been confirmed. It was widely assumed that his boat had exploded in the waters of the New Hebrides and, although parts of the wreck had been gathered, his body had never been recovered. This ambiguity about his survival, however, is of secondary importance. Instead Bachelot's account begins to point to the answer by locating the story in time. He gives no precise date, alas, but the first sentence of his narrative notes that the rumor occurred "after the overthrow of the faction of Liliha." Although the Catholic prelate did not comment further on the relationship between this rumor and her revolt (and thus the earlier rumors), the relationship is clear, Historian Kamakau recognized, for example, the rumor's meaning for those who accepted it as fact: As word of Boki's return spread, "the church party who declared Boki a stinking spirit became like a blunted needle." For a moment, the new political order was not as secure as the Hawaiian Christian chiefs might have liked.⁵⁸

Boki's rumored return was thus an aftershock of no little importance. It spoke to many of his former supporters' greatest hopes, to their dreams of reversing the recent triumph of Kaahumanu and the Christian *ali'i* and reestablishing an earlier political order. That bit of wish fulfillment cut both ways, of course, for the story also testifies to the magnitude of the failure of Liliha's faction to neutralize or destroy Kaahumanu, Bingham, and other political opponents. The level of their loss (and frustration) was manifest in the crack of the whip across the messenger's back, each lash of which—in different ways to be sure—taught the unfortunate *makaainana* and his once-avid audience that rumors are not just idle talk.⁵⁹

Collectively the three rumors remind us of the extent to which such idle talk was integral to everyday life, to the social construction of reality. Deeply woven into the web of culture, these rumors emerge as representations of the social sphere, and only by probing them with this perspective in mind can one begin to explain why, in the spring of 1831, some Hawaiians, missionaries, and merchants thought, spoke, and behaved as they did. This is not a perspective exclusive to Hawaii, however; it has, I think, wider applications. Yes, rumors were a particularly well-developed idiom in the Islands in the early nineteenth century, but so have they been in other places at other times. Precisely for this reason historians should begin to address more systematically the role of rumor

in history. Of perhaps most immediate aid in this quest is one of anthropologist Clifford Geertz's insights: Those who would pursue cultural analyses, he writes, need be alive to those "symbolic forms—words, images, institutions, behaviors—in terms of which, in each place, people actually represent themselves to themselves and to one another." His is a powerful declaration of the interpretative possibilities of symbols—a catalogue to which rumors now must be explicitly added. But its application comes with a qualification, one that reflects a fundamental difference between anthropology and history. William Sewell, whose *Work and Revolution in France* (1980) is indebted to Geertz's ethnographic perspective, nonetheless observes that the anthropological model is static, "little concerned either with processes of change or with the social and political struggles that so often act as motors of change." Time is not of the essence for anthropologists as it is for historians.⁶⁰

The methodological gap is not so wide that it cannot be bridged, of course, and analyses of rumors might help in this regard. What made the Hawaiian rumors particularly potent contemporary symbols, after all, was their evocation, their *assertion* of change over time, change that unfolded in part because of the rumors themselves. If this melding of the two disciplines' central concerns holds true for other rumors, then a more concerted focus on them in a variety of contexts should enable us to continue to assess the contact points between anthropology and history, contact that has already done much to transform historical scholarship in recent years. That assessment will, in turn, compel us to reexamine the very symbolic forms by which we conceive of and reflect upon the meanings of the past, and the manner in which we represent them to ourselves.

NOTES

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1. Maria Ward to Mrs. Ruggles, February 1831, Hawaiian Mission Children's Society (HMCS), Honolulu. The most complete account of Liliha's revolt emerges in Samuel M. Kamakau, *The Ruling Chiefs of Hawaii* (Honolulu: The Kamehameha Schools, 1961), 297-305; secondary source accounts of the rumor do not address its specifics and thus miss part of its significance: See Ralph S. Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom, 1778-1854*:

Foundation and Transformations (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1938), 130; Howard S. Bradley, *The American Frontier in Hawaii: The Pioneers* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1942), 196-198; Gavan Daws, *Shoal of Time: A History of the Hawaiian Islands* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1974), 88-89. For an overview of the city's important social and spatial development see Daws, "Honolulu in the 19th Century: Notes on the Emergence of Urban Society in Hawaii," *Journal of Pacific History* 2 (1967): 77-96.

2. Stephen Reynolds, Journal, April 7, 1831, Peabody Museum, Salem, Massachusetts. On Bingham's career in Hawaii, see Char Miller, *Fathers and Sons: The Bingham Family and the American Mission* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), chapters 1 and 2.

3. Hiram Bingham to Jeremiah Evarts, 23 November 1831, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Harvard University; Reynolds, Journal, 1-8 April 1831; Levi Chamberlain, Journal, 1-8 April 1831, HMCS; Bradley, *American Frontier in Hawaii*, 201-202.

4. Hiram Bingham, *A Residence of Twenty-One Years in the Sandwich Islands* (Hartford, Conn.: H. Huntington, 1849), 409, 313-314, 277, 286; see also his account of a revolt in Kauai, 234-236.

5. Robert Louis Stevenson, *A Footnote in History* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1895), 26; Pauline King, ed., *The Diaries of David Lawrence Gregg* (Honolulu: Hawaiian Historical Society, 1982), 286.

6. King, ed., Diaries, 286. Caroline Ralston offers the best accounts of race relations in Pacific port communities; see "The Pattern of Race Relations in 19th Century Pacific Port Towns," *Journal of Pacific History* 6 (1971): 39-59, and *Grass Huts and Warehouses* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1978). She notes in passing the commonness of rumors, especially within the beach communities, a term applied to the often transient populations of European and American sailors, merchants, and others that collected in the ports during the nineteenth century.

7. Samuel B. Hemingway, ed., *Henry the Fourth, Part Two* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921), induction.

8. Gordon Wood, "A Note on Mobs in the American Revolution," *William and May Quarterly*, October 1966:635-642; George Rude, *The Crowd in the French Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); Georges Lefebvre, *The Great Fear of 1789: Rural Panic in Revolutionary France*, trans. Joan White (New York: Vintage Books, 1973); G. W. Allport and L. J. Postman, *The Psychology of Rumor* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1947); Terry Ann Knopf, *Rumors, Race, and Riots* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1975), 8-11; Ralph L. Rosnow and Gary Alan Fine, *Rumors and Gossip* (New York: Elsevier, 1976); Virgil, *Aeneid*, book 4, lines 179-189.

9. Raymond Firth, "Rumor in a Primitive Society," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 1956:122-132; Knopf, *Rumors, Race, and Riots*, 164, passim. Knopf's contextual approach, which she calls the "process model," is particularly appealing to a historian, for its emphasis is upon the significance a rumor has for those who participate in it and what that can tell us about the world in which they live; this is not an emphasis that is at the

center of most social psychological or sociological research on rumors. Echoes of this approach can be found in Tamotsu Shibutani, *Improvised News: A Sociological Study of Rumor* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1966), 10-17, chapter 6. He argues that rumors are one way that a community can develop consensus through shared interpretations of events, doing so by "pooling their intellectual resources." His is a point well taken, but he implicitly assumes that all draw upon the same pool, from which a coherent worldview will emerge. This may be more true for a homogeneous setting than in multiracial Hawaii. For the current debate over methodological approaches to the study of rumors within the discipline of psychology, see also Ralph Rosnow, "Psychology of Rumors Reconsidered," *Psychological Bulletin*, 1980:578-591; Rosnow and Fine, *Rumors and Gossip*; and Jack Levin and Arnold Arluke, *Gossip: The Inside Scoop* (New York: Plenum Press, 1987). Michael O. Murphy offers a parallel argument for the validity of employing rumor in ethnography, especially in setting the social context, in "Rumors of Identity: Gossip and Rapport in Ethnographic Research," *Human Organization* 2 (1985): 132-136. Max Gluckman, "Gossip and Scandal," *Current Anthropology*, 1963:307-316.

10. Hiram Bingham to Levi Chamberlain, 22 March 1831, HMCS; Hiram Bingham to Rufus Anderson, 21 April 1831, HMCS.

11. Maria Ward to Mrs. Ruggles, February 1831, HMCS; Wards response underscores the fact that not everyone had access to the same information, to the same pool of knowledge (which runs counter to Shibutani's assumptions in *Improvised News*.) Nor could they: Hawaiians, missionaries, and merchants operated from different principles and perspectives.

12. Chamberlain, Journal, March 1831; Gavan Daws, "The High Chief Boki: A Biographical Study in Early Nineteenth-Century Hawaii History," *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, March 1966:65-83; Daws, *Shoal of Time*, 82-87; Bradley, *American Frontier in Hawaii*, 53-120; Dorothy Shineberg, *They Came for Sandalwood* (Melbourne: University of Melbourne Press, 1967), offers the most comprehensive analysis of the lure of and the profits to be wrought from the sandalwood trade.

13. K. R. Howe, *Where the Waves Fall* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 63, 152-154; Daws, *Shoal of Time*, 29-60; Patrick V. Kirch, *Feathered Gods and Fishhooks* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985).

14. Howe, *Where the Waves Fall*, 152-154.

15. Ibid.; Jane L. Silverman, *Kaahumanu: Molder of Change* (Honolulu: Friends of the Judiciary History Center of Hawaii, 1987), 61-67.

16. Caroline Ralston, "Early Nineteenth-Century Polynesian Millennial Cults and the Case of Hawaii," *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, December 1985:314-323, 327-328; Silverman, *Kaahumanu*, 87-97; Marshall Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities: Structure in the Early History of the Sandwich Island Kingdom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981), 55-66; Daws, *Shoal of Time*, 73-76. The commoners' reaction to this political and social shift is discussed in Caroline Ralston, "Hawaii 1778-1854: Some Aspects of *Maka'ainana* Response to Rapid Cultural Change," *Journal of Pacific History*, January 1984:21-40.

17. Silverman, *Kaahumanu*, 101-117; Daws, *Shoal of Time*, 82-89; Miller, *Fathers and Sons*, chapter 2; Kamakau, *Ruling Chiefs*, 270-296; Reginald Yzendoorn, *History of the Catholic Mission in the Hawaiian Islands* (Honolulu: Honolulu Star-Bulletin, 1927), 26-52.
18. Bingham to Chamberlain, 22 March 1831; Chamberlain, *Journal*, 12 March 1831; Kamakau, *Ruling Chiefs*, 297-305; Daws, *Shoal of Time*, 88-89.
19. Silverman, *Kaahumanu*, 80-84.
20. Bingham to Chamberlain, 22 March 1831; Chamberlain, *Journal*, 12 March 1831; Kamakau, *Ruling Chiefs*, 300-301; Kinau to Kaahumanu, 31 March 1831, reprinted in Bingham, *A Residence*, 406.
21. Ward to Ruggles, February 1831; Kamakau, *Ruling Chiefs*, chapter 23.
22. Chamberlain, *Journal*, 11 March 1831; Reynolds, *Journal*, 21 April 1831.
23. Kamakau, *Ruling Chiefs*, 303-304; Chamberlain, *Journal*, 1 April 1831; Reynolds, *Journal*, 24 March 1831.
24. Bingham to Evarts, 23 November 1831.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Reynolds, *Journal*, 7-9 April 1831.
27. Bingham to Evarts, 23 November 1831.
28. Reynolds, *Journal*, 7-9 April 1831; Bingham to Evarts, 23 November 1831; Chamberlain, *Journal*, 9 April 1831.
29. Bradley, *American Frontier in Hawaii*, 201-202.
30. Chamberlain, *Journal*, 1 April 1831; Reynolds, *Journal*, 1 April 1831; Silverman, *Kaahumanu*, 126-136.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*; Daws, *Shoal of Time*, 88-91.
34. Reynolds, *Journal*, 7 April 1831.
35. Reynolds, *Journal*, 1 April 1831.
36. Bingham, *A Residence*, 391.
37. Silverman, *Kaahumanu*, 128-131.
38. Hiram Bingham to Lydia Bingham, 4 April 1829, HMCS; Bingham, *A Residence*, *passim*; Miller, *Fathers and Sons*, chapter 2; Daws, *Shoal of Time*, 61-87.
39. Kuykendall, *Hawaiian Kingdom*, 133-153.
40. A. Grove Day, *History Makers of Hawaii* (Honolulu: Mutual Publishing, 1984), 39, recounts Emma's genealogical connections.

41. Bingham to Evarts, 23 November 1831.
42. Reynolds, Journal, 7-9 April 1831; Bingham to Evarts, 23 November 1831.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Bingham to Evarts, 23 November 1831.
49. Ibid.
50. Kamakau, *Ruling Chiefs*, 297-305, provides the most sustained and serious account of her revolt.
51. Daws, *Shoal of Time*, 65-87; Knopf, *Rumors, Race, and Riots*, speaks of the ways by which rumors can crystallize, confirm, and intensify hostile beliefs, and when these are linked to actual events, can then provide the “proof” necessary for action (chapter 4, but especially 164-165); the rumors in Hawaii seem to follow this pattern. See also Shibutani, *Improvised News*, 172-176.
52. Daws, *Shoal of Time*, 91-94; Kuykendall, *Hawaiian Kingdom*, 133-152; Bradley, *American Frontier in Hawaii*, 271-277, all emphasize the turbulence in Hawaiian affairs after Kaahumanu’s death—and there was a good deal. But what is truly striking is how easily the chiefs asserted their power to rein in Kauikeaouli in 1833. They could not have done so if they had not already absorbed his authority in 1831; their actions then, to which the rumors clearly contributed, laid the foundation for his later capitulation. For manifestations of the deterioration of relations between Kauikeaouli and the *ali’i*, see Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors*, 65-66.
53. Reynolds, Journal, 24 February 1839. In 1839 another symbolic victory occurred: Liliha converted to Christianity shortly before she died.
54. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* (New York: A. J. Muste Institute, 1985), 17-19; Firth, “Rumor in a Primitive Society,” 122, seconds the possibility of the creative, salubrious nature of some rumors. This is not to deny the damaging impact rumors can have, but to focus so exclusively on this aspect of them—as most scholarship does—is to miss their complexity and thus the multiplicity of their meanings.
55. Kamakau, *Ruling Chiefs*, 305; Daws, *Shoal of Time*, 87; Yzendoorn, *Catholic Mission*, 52-53.
56. Daws, *Shoal of Time*, 87.
57. Ibid. It is from this incident that one can date the emergence of a Hawaiian colloquial expression: When “a Hawaiian wishes to speak of something that cannot possibly happen, he says it will take place ‘when Boki comes back’ ” (A. F. Judd, quoted in Laura Fish Judd, *Honolulu: Sketches of Life in the Sandwich Islands, 1828 to 1861* [Chicago: R. R. Donnelley and Sons, 1966], 83).
58. Kamakau, *Ruling Chiefs*, 305; Yzendoorn, *Catholic Mission*, 52-53.

59. Ibid.

60. Clifford Geertz, "On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding," *American Scientist*, January-February 1975:48. Also helpful in thinking about mental symbols by which people represent themselves to others are Francois Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and William Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980), 10-13. Not all anthropologists are unconcerned with time and context: See Geertz, *A Social History of an Indonesian Town* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965]; Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), especially chapter 5; Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors*, 3-9, 67-72.