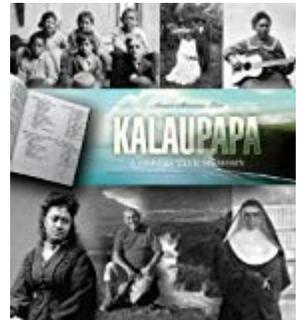


Anwei Skinsnes Law. *Kalaupapa: A Collective Memory.* Latitutte 20 Book Series. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2012. Illustrations. 576 pp. \$49.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8248-3465-4.



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The island of Molokai, site of the former Hawaiian leprosy colony, is familiar to many of us through academic histories, popular culture, and religious hagiographical works. For over a century from 1866, thousands of people deemed to have contracted the disease were forcibly exiled to remote and windswept Kalaupapa, on the island's western peninsula. Outbreak of leprosy in the Hawaiian islands occurred in the early phase of an epidemic sweeping the Pacific region from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries following European colonization. Fear and misunderstanding of the disease, combined with the absence of any effective treatment, underpinned the decision of the Hawaiian Health Board to introduce mandatory isolation laws. It was not the only administration in the colonized world to do so, but it was certainly one of the first. Residents of the isolated settlements that formed as a consequence of such policies, in Hawaii and in other countries, could expect to remain there until they died; for many, this could last until old age, as leprosy in itself is seldom fatal. It is these lives that form the

focus of a recent publication by Anwei Skinsnes Law, with the title *Kalaupapa: A Collective Memory*.

Law's book departs from other works on Kalaupapa in its foregrounding of the experiences, circumstances, and perspectives of the residents. This is unusual in leprosy histories. Most examine policies and practices of the authorities, whether they be religious or state. They are informative of broader ideals and imperatives but provide limited understanding of the responses and actions of the settlements' residents. Law's objective, in her own words, is "to bring these voices back into the history of Kalaupapa, the history of Hawaii and the history of the world" (p. xiii). She therefore sees her task as retrieving a lost or hidden past, one that is increasingly slipping away from personal recall as the former residents grow old and pass away. It is also one that has been partially obscured by the dominant histories in the field. The figures who loom large in such representations are Father Damien, Mother Marianne Cope, and, one-time visitor, Robert Louis Steven-

son, among others, while those with leprosy remain an indistinguishable group, either victims of cruel state neglect or grateful recipients of Christian charity. Law successfully disrupts this portrayal by her extensive use of sources from the residents—their images, letters, poetry, and memories—to construct a more complex and nuanced understanding of life at Kalaupapa and its individual residents.

The book is organized chronologically, beginning in 1866 with the first arrivals to Molokai, and ending in around 2005, when former residents recount their memories in interviews with Law. Each of the book's five parts is divided into several short chapters and these are mostly based on separate pivotal events or personalities in the island's history set against the changing social, medical, and political developments of the broader context. Much of the text is in narrative form, richly supported with the source material, while there is only light interpretation of the history provided. But this is not unexpected as Law did not come to this work as a historian. Rather, she has a longstanding personal attachment to the people of this place that was sparked while visiting Molokai as a young woman with her father, a highly respected leprologist, the late Olaf K. Skinsnes (1917-97). Law also takes this interest into her professional life, advocating on behalf of people with leprosy, through her position as international coordinator of IDEA (International Association for Integration Dignity and Economic Advancement).

This is a large and attractive volume, brimming with high quality photographs of the residents and the landscapes they inhabited. Many of the images, especially the close-up portraits, are deeply poignant, and reinforce the human dimension of this public health policy while highlighting the individuality of those affected. In my view, this imagery is the most striking and effective feature of the book. Whether of the wistful or cheerful, it compels us to empathize and connect with

the subjects rather than rely on the kind of imaginings inevitably conjured up from reading texts on histories of trauma. For the historian, all the photos in the book, as with the written testimony, serve as valuable records both of Kalaupapa's changing past and its reflection of momentous shifts in Hawaii's history since the imperial era. Law is not the first writer to draw parallels between the incursion of US imperialism and intensified regulation over "diseased" people in Hawaii. Nor is her point about the disjuncture between Western ways of managing infectious disease and Hawaiian culture original. But in her work we see these problems as they affected, and were responded to by, the Kalaupapa people—in their words, and in the images of their activities, the buildings they used, the communities they formed, and so on.

As part of redressing a historical record that has at times overlooked or misinterpreted the parts played by Hawaiians with leprosy, Law brings in new evidence or recounts older versions that privilege their points of view. This approach enhances our understanding of the choices made by these individuals. It attributes an agency to them that might be unexpected given their illness and official subordination to Hawaiian or, subsequently, American state authorities. We thus learn of the "love and resistance" of Koolau, who, while defending his right to remain with his family, rather than submit to removal to Kalaupapa, shot dead government soldiers pursuing him (p. 234). In other less tragic incidents, residents protested against oppressive conditions or rules at Kalaupapa with varying successes or failures. One example concerned the new federal hospital, the US Leprosy Investigation Station, built at great expense in 1909 following the annexation of Hawaii by the United States. It was forced to close four years later after a patient boycott. Residents deplored the strict confinement and rules, such as sexual segregation and a ban on pets, and refused to use the hospital, despite its high standard treatment facilities. Narratives in which the residents'

actions determined outcomes for the ways they were managed are more common in histories of the Carville Leprosarium in mainland United States but, for Hawaii, have been rare until the publication of this book. An exception is Michelle T. Moran's *Colonizing Leprosy* (2007) in which she identifies at Kalaupapa an "activism [that] transformed conditions for patients ... but did not always bring about the intended results." [1]

Law does not confine her discussion to those designated as patients. Considerable space is devoted to resident male and female missionaries (including Father Damien); high-profile visitors, such as Shirley Temple and the Von Trapp family; and a succession of superintendents. That they were important to some of the people who encountered them at Kalaupapa and to the memories of people today is borne out by the evidence Law presents, much of it from first-hand perspectives. Nevertheless, in the absence of any contrasting views or interpretations, the missionaries, in particular, continue to be cast solely in the light of their selfless altruism, rendering the residents once again as passive recipients of their care. By muting her voices and allowing the sources to speak for themselves, Law's views are not concealed; they remain clear in her selection of sources that inevitably contribute to this impression, such as Sister Leopoldina's diary.

Potent as they are, episodes of heroic resistance and chronicles of saints and stars are not the only elements to make such a history engaging. No less remarkable are the stories of the eight thousand or so people detained on the island for a disease they may or may not have contracted. The cameos of many of Kalaupapa's residents that fill the book testify to the extraordinary impact this policy of exile had on both the individuals and their families, and the ways they found to accommodate conditions on the island. It is difficult, for example, not to be moved by the custom, at one time, of partners or other family members (*mea kokua* = loved ones) following people into exile to

care for them. Here they remained indefinitely, with little regard for the risk posed to their own health. This book is really a celebration of that kind of valor. As Law reminds us, every individual who went to live at Kalaupapa made great sacrifices in the interests of public welfare. The toll of leprosy isolation—the pain, oppression, starvation, and yearning for home—was never recognized or sufficiently recompensed, either in Kalaupapa or elsewhere in the world. Apart from its other many strengths, this intriguing and beautifully crafted book by Law might just go a little way to repaying this debt.

Note

[1]. Michelle T. Moran, *Colonizing Leprosy: Imperialism and the Politics of Public Health in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 205.

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