On the Frontlines of Maunakea

JAMAICA HEOLIMELEIKALANI OSORIO

Ask me about the mauna
And I will tell you
How every morning I woke to a lāhui growing
As if we were watching Maui fish us
One by one
From the sea …
How on the third morning I watched
As 30 became 100
then 100 became 1000
then 1000 became us all
Each and every one of our Akua standing beside us

— Jamaica Heolimeleikalani Osorio
excerpt from “Ask me about the Mauna”

On July 17, 2019, I watched alongside my Lāhui as 38 of our beloved kūpuna stood fiercely in their aloha for our ‘āina and were hauled away by State and Hawai‘i County law enforcement officers. The Kūpuna had staged themselves in the center of the Maunakea Access road to block the transport of construction equipment up the mountain. Hundreds of thousands of people clung to their Facebook and Instagram live feeds while nearly a thousand kia‘i, a sea of protectors, lined the Ala Hulu Kūpuna and flooded the pāhoehoe with our tears.

Just two days earlier, eight kia‘i, myself included, had chained ourselves to the cattle guard on the access road to prevent the delivery of construction equipment. At 2 a.m I pulled on my cargo pants, my long-sleeve paddling jersey, and my hoodie with the words “See You on the Mauna” printed across it. In my pockets I carried only the essentials: lip balm, sunscreen, a vial of salt water from Kailua Bay, and a small bag of homemade cookies from my sister. Like most of my hoa aloha ‘āina I was severely underdressed for the cold. I worried that the midday heat would be too much to bear in my thermal gear, so underdressing was the choice many of us made.

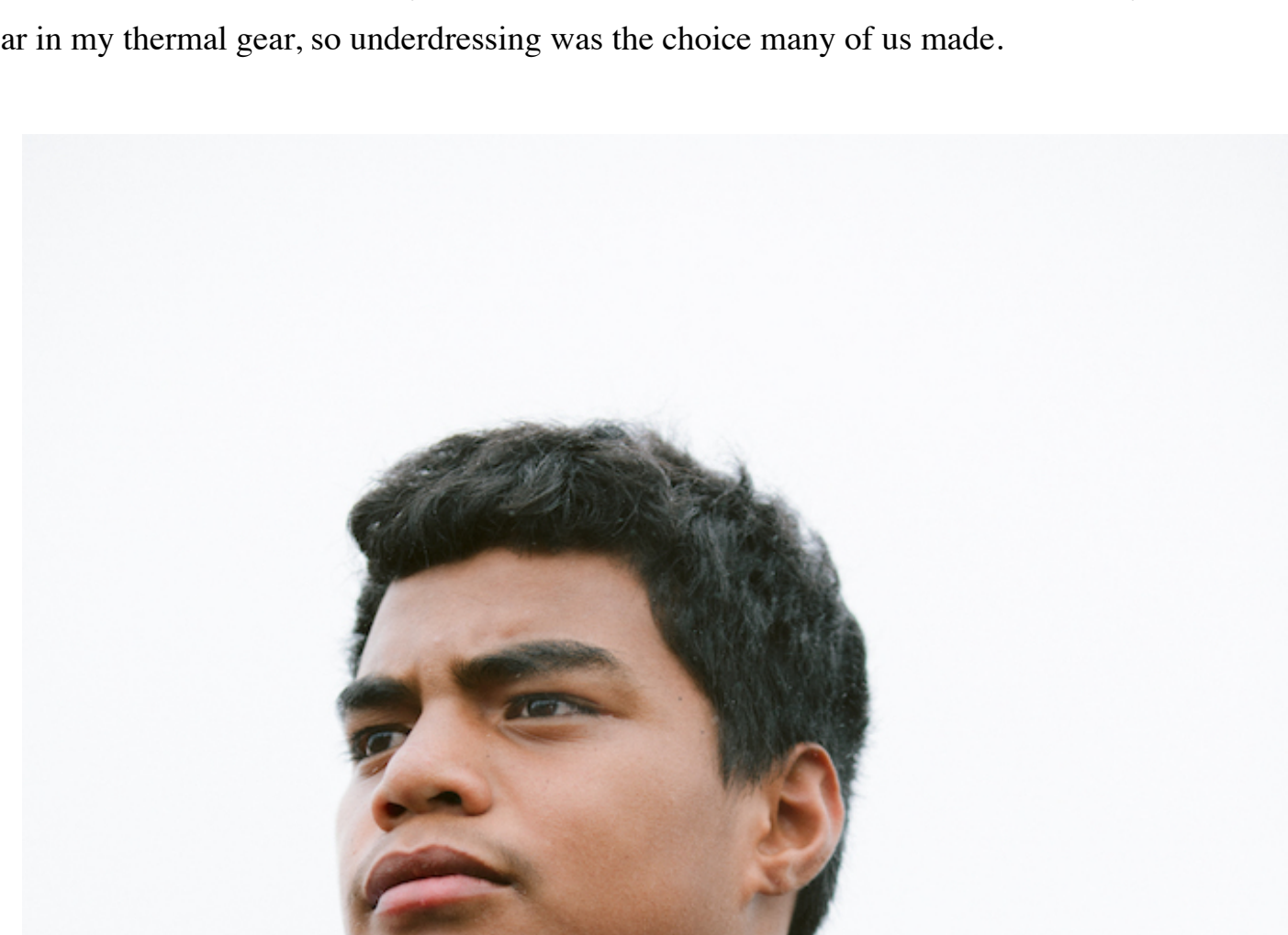


Image by Michelle Mishina of protector Shaydan Racoma at Maunakea.

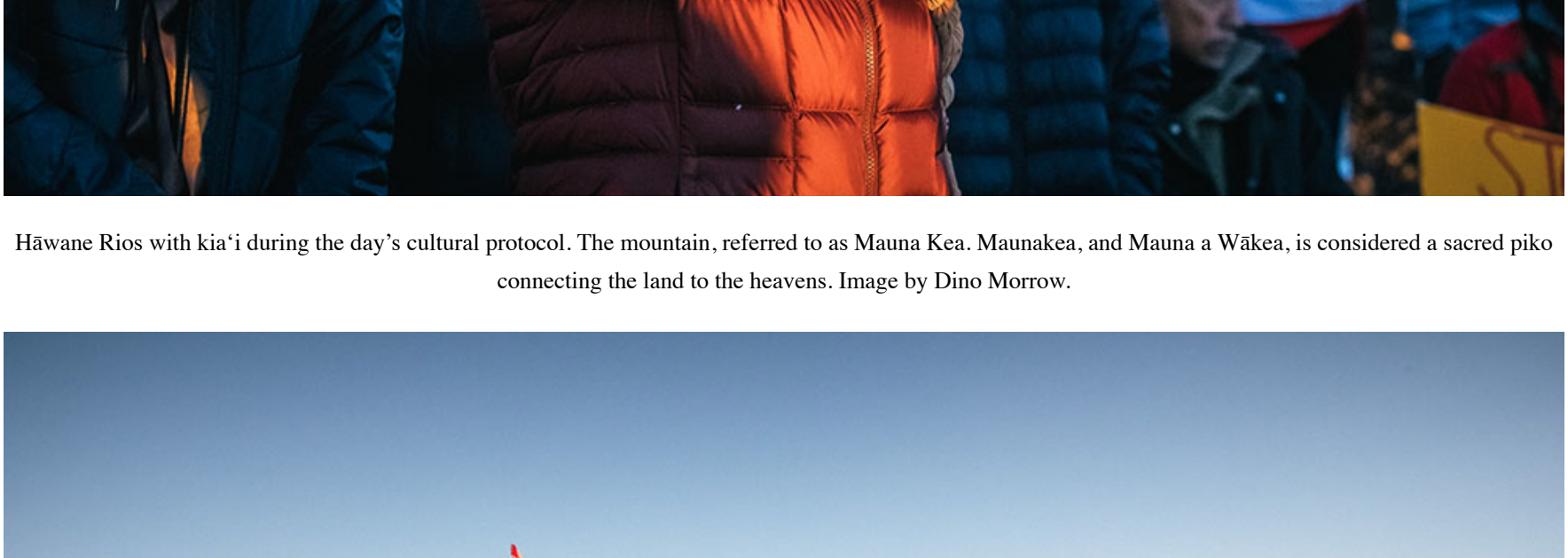
The eight of us ascended the access road together; we were joined by Kahala Johnson and Mahea Ahia who were our primary kōkua (supporters) and protectors. While we crawled upon the guard and locked ourselves into place we looked up in fear as a patrol vehicle sped recklessly down the mountain towards us. Malia Hulleman and I had just chained ourselves to each other and the grate when the bright lights began to approach us with alarm. Kahala and Mahea bravely put their bodies between us and the oncoming officer just as we put our bodies between the mauna and any construction vehicles. Without their protection any one of us could have been easily killed or severely injured. These were the first moments of what would be our 12-hour standoff with Hawai‘i enforcement agencies.

The steel cattle guard pressed against our thin clothing and brought our temperatures down at a dangerous rate. I remember shivering so hard that my muscles began to ache. I looked in awe at the mana of Malia, the wahine who laid before me. When we walked up the access road that morning we were strangers, but by the power of aloha ‘āina we quickly became partners and eventually each other’s family. So I channeled all of the warmth I found in her eyes into steadying my pulse. I wanted there to be no mistaking my convulsing body for fear.

We were not afraid.
We were resolved.
We were honored to be chosen to take this stand for our ‘āina.

We were just simply freezing in the cold. Then, by midday, we traded the threat of hyperthermia for extreme heat exposure. Many of us resorted to cutting off pieces of our clothes to endure the climbing temperatures. The only thing we were unwilling to do was to stand down.

Hāwane Rios with kia‘i during the day’s cultural protocol. The mountain, referred to as Mauna Kea. Maunakea, and Mauna a Wākea, is considered a sacred piko connecting the land to the heavens. Image by Dino Morrow.



The kūpuna line of elders prior to their arrests. After they were detained by state officers, the number of protectors at the site grew to the thousands. Image by Dino Morrow.

Frontline pilina in the malu of the mauna
by Jamaica Osorio

It’s Wednesday
And I find myself standing
In the shadow of a mauna that loves me like islands emerging from the sea
Like a sky scattering Herself in stars
Like a lāhui kanaka growing

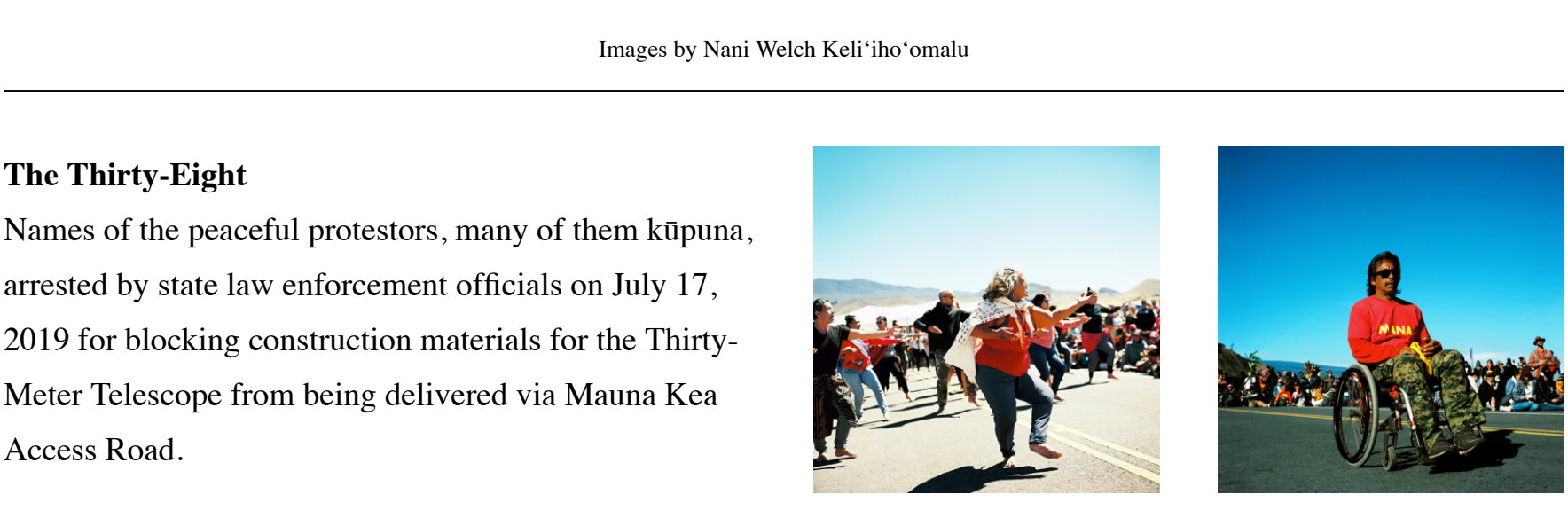
I’m standing in the Malu of a movement
That’s captured an generations heart and attention
I find myself
Here
My body
A kīpuka expanding
Into pele’s pāhoehoe grip
Holding holding holding my quiet

It’s Wednesday and I find myself
Without searching
Arms linked with a line of women
I barely know
But was destined to love
A line of women stretching back for thousands of generations
Pō, turned light,
turned puko’a
turned slime
turned gods in a time of mere men

Image by Nani Welch Keli‘iho‘omalu

Who more fierce then these bodies of islands
They bodies of women
These moku turned ‘āina
Spilling into our sea of islands
These hands stretched out
Feeding a generation
Accustomed to starvation

And then Aunty tells me
We are the generation they always dreamed of
So it’s Wednesday and now I am weeping
And every kūpuna that ever fought,
ever cried, ever died
so that we would know for sure how to stand
Is singing through me
And somehow
Somehow i am still standing
Arms linked in a line of women
Holding me
And all I have to offer them
Is this story
That is incomplete



Images by Nani Welch Keli‘iho‘omalu

The Thirty-Eight
Names of the peaceful protestors, many of them kūpuna, arrested by state law enforcement officials on July 17, 2019 for blocking construction materials for the Thirty-Meter Telescope from being delivered via Mauna Kea Access Road.

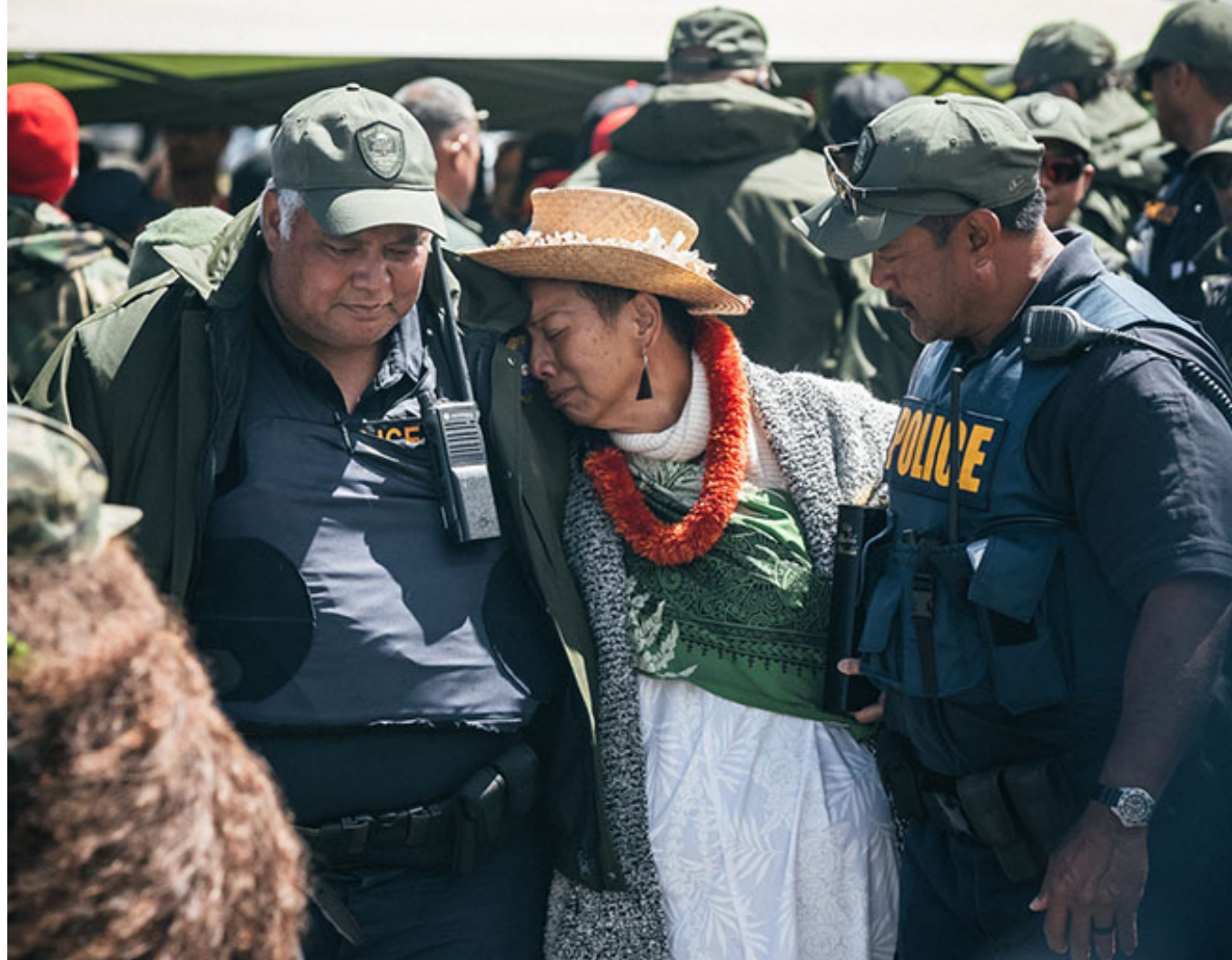
James Albertini
Sharol Ku‘ualoha Awai
Tomas Belsky
Marie Alohalani Brown
Gene Burke
Daycia-Dee Chun
Richard L. Deleon
Alika Desha
William K. Freitas
Patricia Green
Desmond Haumea
Flora Hookano
Kelii Ioane
Maxine Kahåuelio
Ana Kaho‘opi‘i
Mahea Kalima
Kaliko Lehua Kanaele
Pualani Kanaka‘ole Kanahele
Deborah Lee
Donna Leong
Daniel Li
Carmen Lindsey
Linda Leilani Lindsey-Ka‘apuni
Abel Lui
Likookalani Martin
James Nani‘ole
Luana Neff
Deena Oana-Hurwitz
Edleen Peleiholani
Renee Price
Haloley Reese
Loretta Ritte
Walter Ritte
Raynette Robinson
Damian Trask
Mililani Trask
John Turalde
Noe Noe Wong-Wilson

Faces of the kia‘i.
Images by Jonathan Canlas.

As kia‘i, we knew that it was both our responsibility and privilege to lay our bodies down in the protection of our ‘āina. With the guidance of our mo‘olelo and kūpuna, we also knew that as kānaka we had the right to lie in the streets without fear of harm, invoking Ke Kānawai Māmalahoe, the Law of the Splintered Paddle. When we asserted ourselves upon that right, we challenged not only the Thirty Meter Telescope’s transport of construction vehicles, but the State of Hawai‘i’s marriage to its colonial vision of law and order. We lodged this challenge not in chaos but rather within the organized adherence to our kānāwai, our Hawaiian governing norms, that have existed hundreds of years before the State took its first stolen breath.

After we had laid there in the malu, the shade and protection, of our mauna and our lāhui for over 12 hours, the police retreated in defeat. Aloha ‘Āina had won the day; we committed to each other and ourselves that we would be back for as many days as we are needed to until the TMT corporation leaves our islands.

On that day our commitment and aloha for each other and the mauna sent a call from Pu‘uhonua o Pu‘uhuluhulu to our lāhui across the world to join in the protection of our sacred Mauna a Wākea in the face of the proposed desecration from the development of a massive telescope on its peak.



Emotions ran hgigh wehn the kūpuna, some in wheelchairs and with canes, blocking Mauna Kea Access Road from the delivery equipment for the Thirty Meter Telescope were arrested on July 17, 2019. Image by Dino Morrow.

The next morning, our numbers had increased from a couple hundred to nearly a thousand kia‘i ready to stand and put their bodies between our mauna and any acts of desecration. We stood proud, basking in the wealth and brilliance of our people. We also stood anxious, because as our numbers grew, so did the numbers of officers, and their weaponry and machinery. As we grew to possibly the greatest activation of our people since the Kū‘ē Petitions in 1897, a mass petition drive established by Hui Aloha ‘Āina (Hawaiian Patriotic League) against the annexation of Hawai‘i to the United States, we wondered if we would be met with force that we, contemporary kānaka, had never before encountered.

In the wake of our rising wave, the State had assembled officers from at least six agencies. And while these officers collected their weapons—riot gear, sound cannons, mace, tear gas, and wooden batons—our kumu, masters of ceremony, lead us in the kāhea, the call, of our akua.

So when July 17 arrived, our lāhui was prepared. As police detained our kūpuna one by one, each empty seat was quickly filled by another kupuna, until all 38 elders there had been arrested. The rest of us, their mo‘opuna, gave the officers only our silence. Not even the satisfaction of our wailing grief would surround them. And as our silence grew, so did our mana. I watched as our collective pain quickly and intentionally turned to action. And when the final kūpuna were hauled away, their places were flooded with hundreds of mana wāhine supported by our kāne at our backs. And again, our people controlled the road, controlled our destiny, and continued to protect our ‘āina.

Kia‘i answering the call of their lāhui. Above, protector Tee Seminavage. Image by Michelle Mishina.

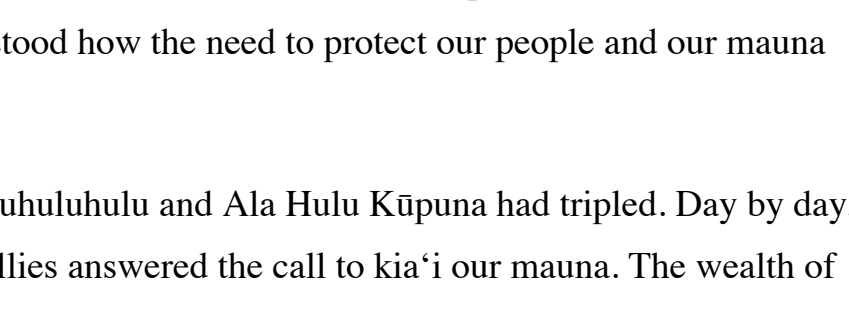
When the mana wāhine took the road, we remembered the teachings of our kupuna. We sang our mele, chanted our oli, some even danced our hula. We offered aloha and care to each other and the police officers who stood in opposition to us. We reminded them that we stood there for our children and their children. When the police brought out the LRAD / Sound cannon we passed around ear plugs and pule. We leaned into women we had just met sharing words of aloha and protection. We held tightly onto each other. We insisted that we would protect our lāhui as fiercely as we would protect our mauna. In that moment, we understood how the need to protect our people and our mauna were the same.

The next morning, the number of kia‘i who gathered at Pu‘uhuluhulu and Ala Hulu Kūpuna had tripled. Day by day, we continued to grow. Three to five thousand kānaka and allies answered the call to kia‘i our mauna. The wealth of our mana resounded across the pae ‘āina while the State spent more than $10 million on its threat to remove us from our ancestral lands.

For the Lāhui
By Josh Tatofi
Lyrics by Hinaleimoana Wong

E welo mau loa ku‘u hae aloha
I ka nu‘u o ka lewa lani lā
A e maluhia no nā kau a kau
Eō Hawai‘i ku‘u ‘āina aloha

E ku‘u lāhui e
Wiwo ‘ole e
Kū kānaka e
‘Onipa‘a mau
Ua mau ke ea o ka ‘āina i ka pono
Ua mau ke ea o ka ‘āina i ka pono



My beloved flag waves ever more
in the last year‘s heights of the sky.

Always and forever more in peace and tranquility
Hail your name, oh Hawai‘i, my beloved motherland

To you my nation
Be bold and fearless,
Stand as kānaka,
And be steadfast in your place.
For the freedom of our land remains always in the truth of our people.

And today our movements continue to grow. Our kia‘i continue to govern the Ala Hulu Kūpuna with aloha ‘āina, in strict kapu aloha. Our people are rising like a mighty wave, and what we have accomplished cannot be cast aside. In less than three months, our movement brought thousands of people to the mauna physically (and hundreds of thousands virtually). Most of these kia‘i had never stood in the Mauna a Wākea’s malu prior. That’s thousands of people who had never had the opportunity to develop an intimate pilina, a closeness, to one of our most sacred ‘āina.

Through our collective ea, our independence, our breath, and our commitment to aloha ‘āina, we brought these kānaka home. And in doing so, we have cultivated in our people an intimacy with a part of our ‘āina we had been strategically estranged from. We should celebrate the many ways our people are returning to an aloha ‘āina that are not simply political but are also deeply intimate and emotional. The growing intimacies between each other and our ‘āina is our greatest wealth because it is what makes us Kanaka Maoli in the first place.

A growing number of Hawaiʻi's youth are standing firm in solidarity with the Maunakea movement. Image by Michelle Mishina.

And as we continue to assert ourselves as kanaka we do so through the greatest creative outpouring of our collective lifetime. Song writers, poets, kumu hula, filmmakers, and playwrights are all taking part in telling and protecting this moʻolelo. We are writing the histories of our time in our own voices, with our own melodies and dancing them with our own bodies, just as our kūpuna did for us when they composed mele like "Waika," "Kaulana Nā Pua," "Ka Mamakakaua," and "All Hawaiʻi Stand Together." Our creativity both describes and expands our current movement. Because of our commitment to the moʻolelo of our rise, our moʻopuna will sing, dance, and speak of the brilliance of our movement to protect Mauna a Wākea long after we have passed into the realm of pō.

Kānaka living around the world are also taking these lessons of aloha and pilina to their home communities. And so, as we continue to grow together in aloha for each other and our home, we must remember that it was this very intimacy of aloha ʻāina that pulled islands out of the depths of the sea, that called upon the great koa (warriors) of our history to fight against a variety of oppressive forces, and that mobilized kānaka opposition to U.S. imperialism and annexation. The intimacy of aloha ʻāina carried 15,000 Native Hawaiians to march to the ʻIolani Palace in 1993 in recognition of 100 years of being a stolen kingdom. In 2018, aloha ʻāina called another 20,000 to return to that march to celebrate the vibrancy of our resilience and resurgence. Putting this intimate aloha ʻāina to action today has resulted in similar uprisings in our communities in Waimānalo, Kalaeloa, and Kahuku and will surely empower the continued rising of our kiaʻi on Maui and Kauaʻi.

I believe it is only a matter of time until the Thirty Meter Telescope corporation packs up its bags and departs our beautiful home. But we must always remind ourselves and our opponents that we are not simply standing in opposition to desecration; rather, we are fearlessly committed to protecting our humanity and our ability to live, breathe, think, and act as our kūpuna have for generations. This movement reminds us that protecting ʻāina is what makes us Kānaka in the first place. From where I stand, that is the wealth of our ʻike kūpuna that we surely cannot afford to lose.

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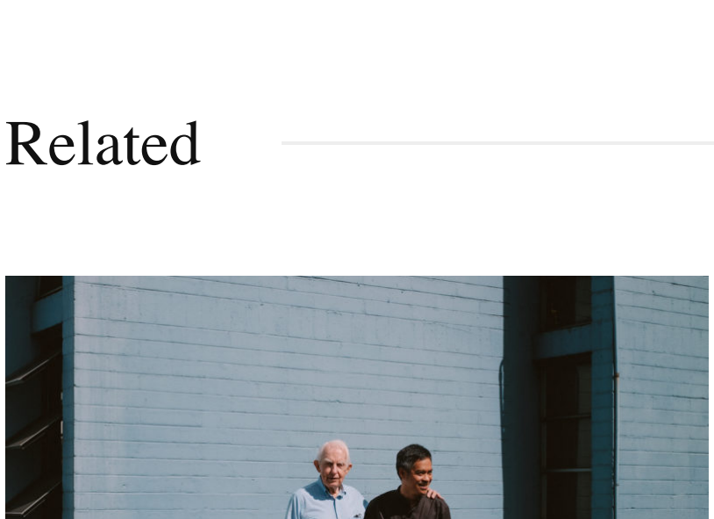
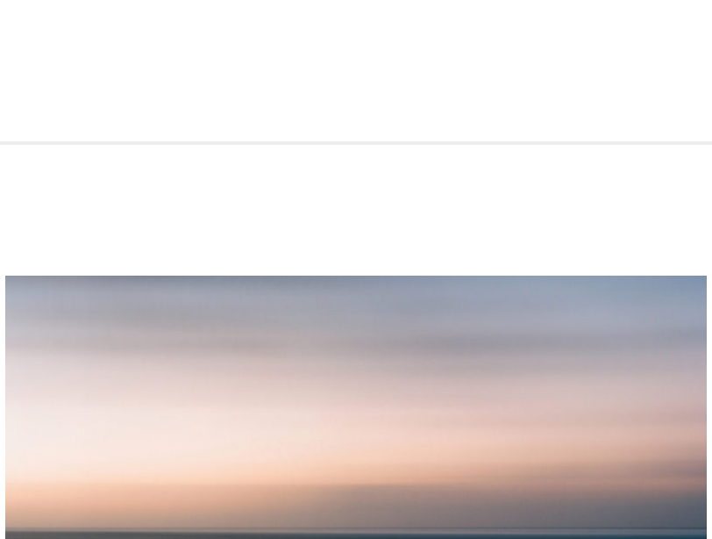


The Odd Couple



These Postmodernist Photographs Invite Closer Inspection

How Photographer Nakemiah Williams Heals Trauma Through Polaroids

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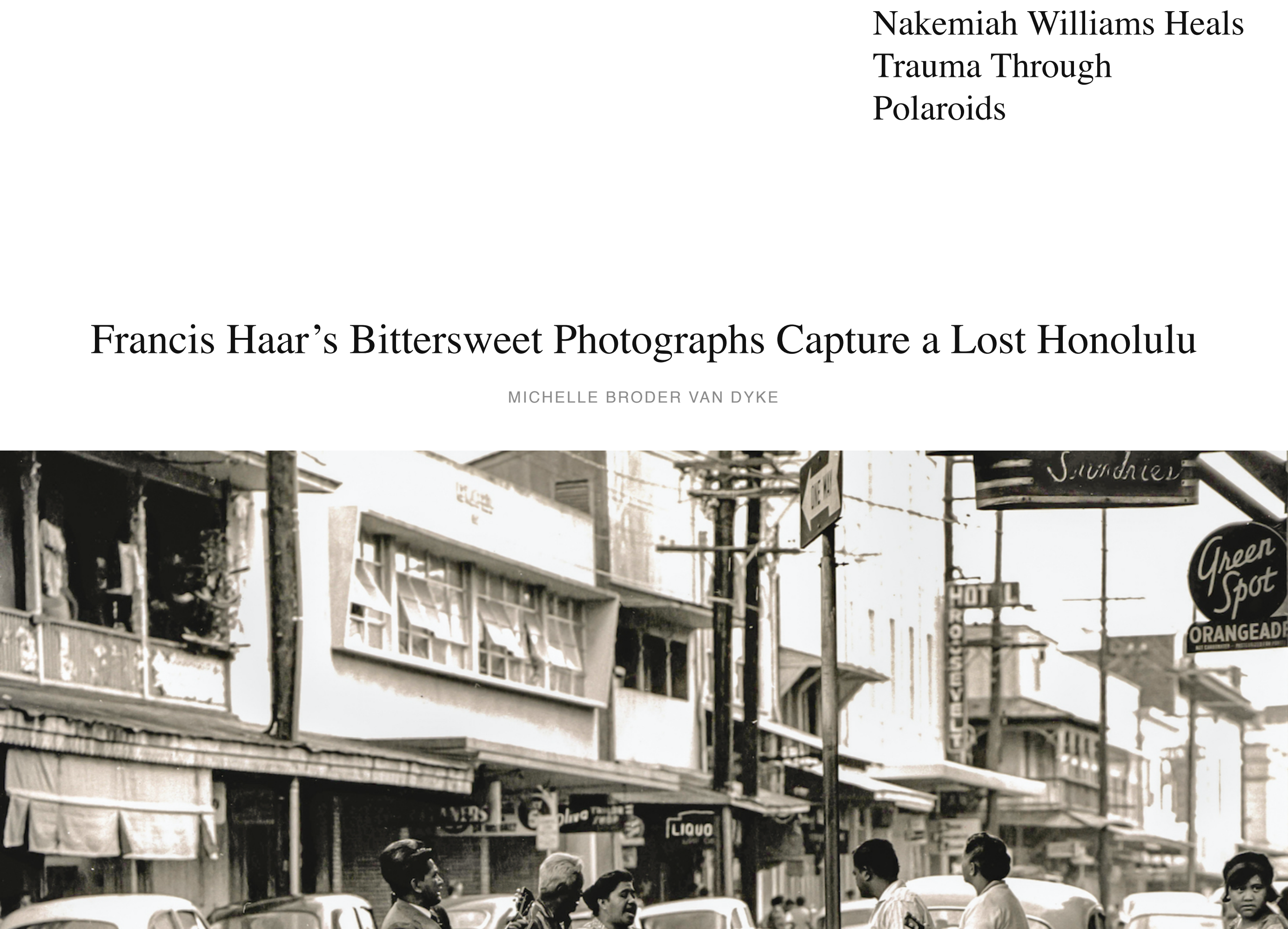
Francis Haar's Bittersweet Photographs Capture a Lost Honolulu

MICHELLE BRODER VAN DYKE



Images by Francis Haar

A Foremost milk carton. A wrecking ball. A woman wearing a muʻumuʻu and slippers. A demolition claw obliterating a building. Signs for the Glory Inn, Uptown Cafe, and Paradise Pool Room. Shards of wood piled up by structures getting razed. Families washing dishes on the lānai surrounding a tenement. The exposed edge of a stone building being torn down. People standing in the streets strumming ʻukulele and a guitar.

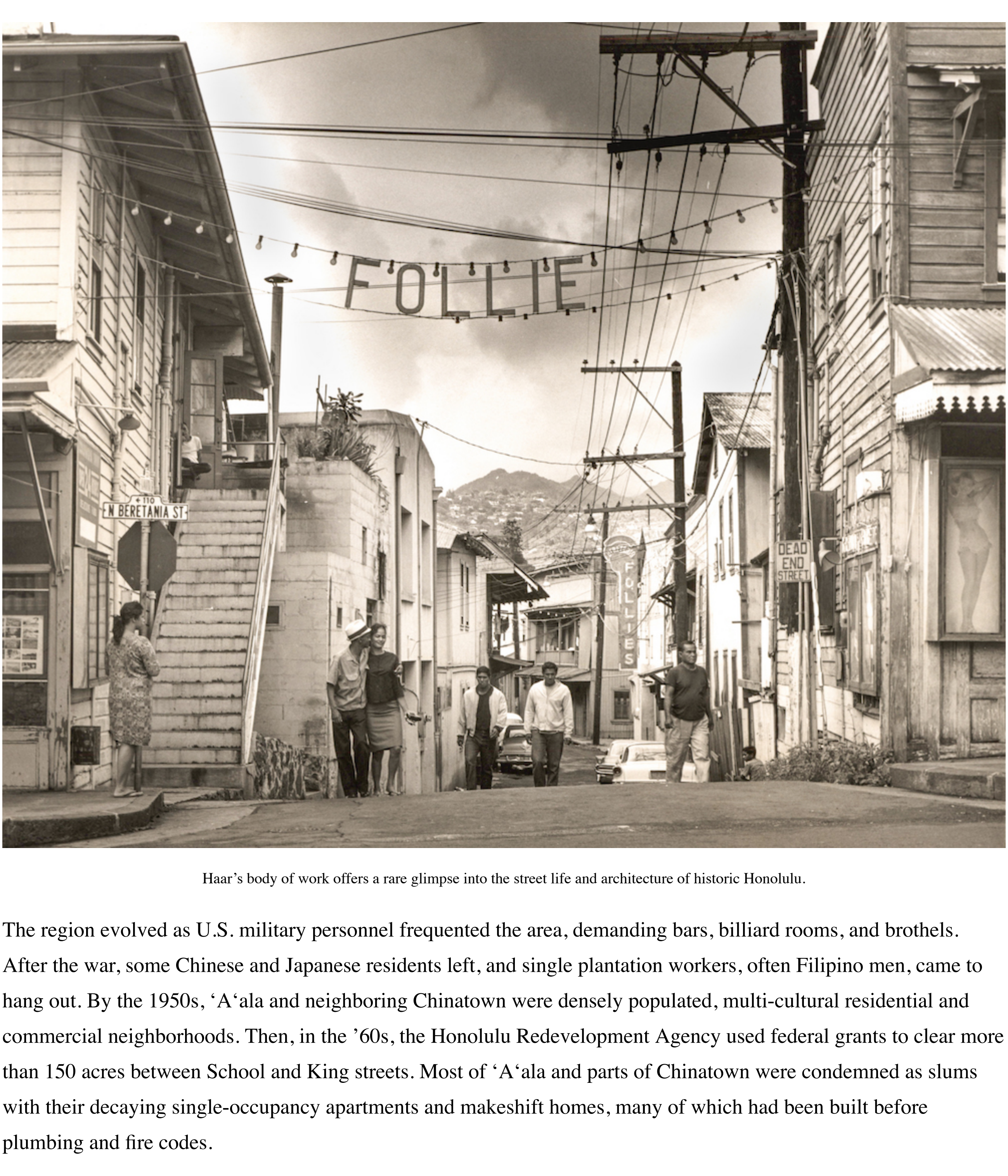
These stark images photographed by Francis Haar are of a Honolulu disappearing. He shot them in the 1960s at the convergence of Chinatown and Pālama along Nuʻuanu Stream, though they could have been taken in Kakaʻako or Mōʻiliʻili in 2019. Haar used a medium-format camera, a Mamiya C33 twin-lens reflex, which allowed for intimacy with the subject. (The viewfinder is on top of the camera, so the lenses are at his waist.) While he focused on the spaces that were about to be destroyed, he also looked at the people who frequented them, documenting the neighborhood's humanity. Images show kids running on a lānai, a man leaning on a car while smoking a cigar, a woman with a sly smile crossing the street.

Haar, was born in 1908 in Hungary and lived in Paris, Tokyo, and Chicago before moving to Honolulu in 1960 with his wife, Irene, who was also a photographer, subject, and assistant. He became interested in ʻAʻala while working as a photography professor at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa when Kenneth Bushnell, a friend and painter who had a studio in the neighborhood, told him it was going to be razed. Haar captured more than 300 pictures in ʻAʻala and the surrounding area while it was torn down, and he collaborated with Bushnell and writer Stephen Bartlett to make a documentary titled Aala — Life and Death of a Community. The film and 40 of Haar's photos are on display until December 6, 2019 at UH Mānoa's John Young Museum of Art.

"Every picture that you have taken—that moment is gone," said Gaye Chan, the UH art history professor who curated the show, titled Disappearing Honolulu. "What I love about seeing old photographs is not really nostalgia, but it allows my body to occupy a different time and space momentarily."

Growing up on Oʻahu, my early memories of ʻAʻala Park are from the 1990s, when Mayor Frank Fasi declared it a homeless "safe zone." Then in 2002, an old roller-skating rink was renovated and turned into a skate park. In 2019, the city added a fenced dog park, and the 11-story, $100-million headquarters for American Savings Bank was completed across the street. This block is a microcosm of what I have witnessed across Honolulu—everything changing around me as I change too. When I'm at the park, these memories are layered on top of the landscape, and it can be easy to assume this was the way it always was. But Haar's photos capture a nearly forgotten history of a place I thought I knew.

Between 1900 and 1940, ʻAʻala Triangle (now the northern half of the park) was the center of a bustling community of Japanese-owned markets, movie theatres, dance halls, and hotels. Commonly known today as Pālama, ʻAʻala came to be called Japantown as many Japanese immigrants moved off plantations into the area. But the neighborhood began to struggle in 1941 with World War II, when some of the business owners and community leaders were sent to internment camps, forcing shops and social clubs to shutter.

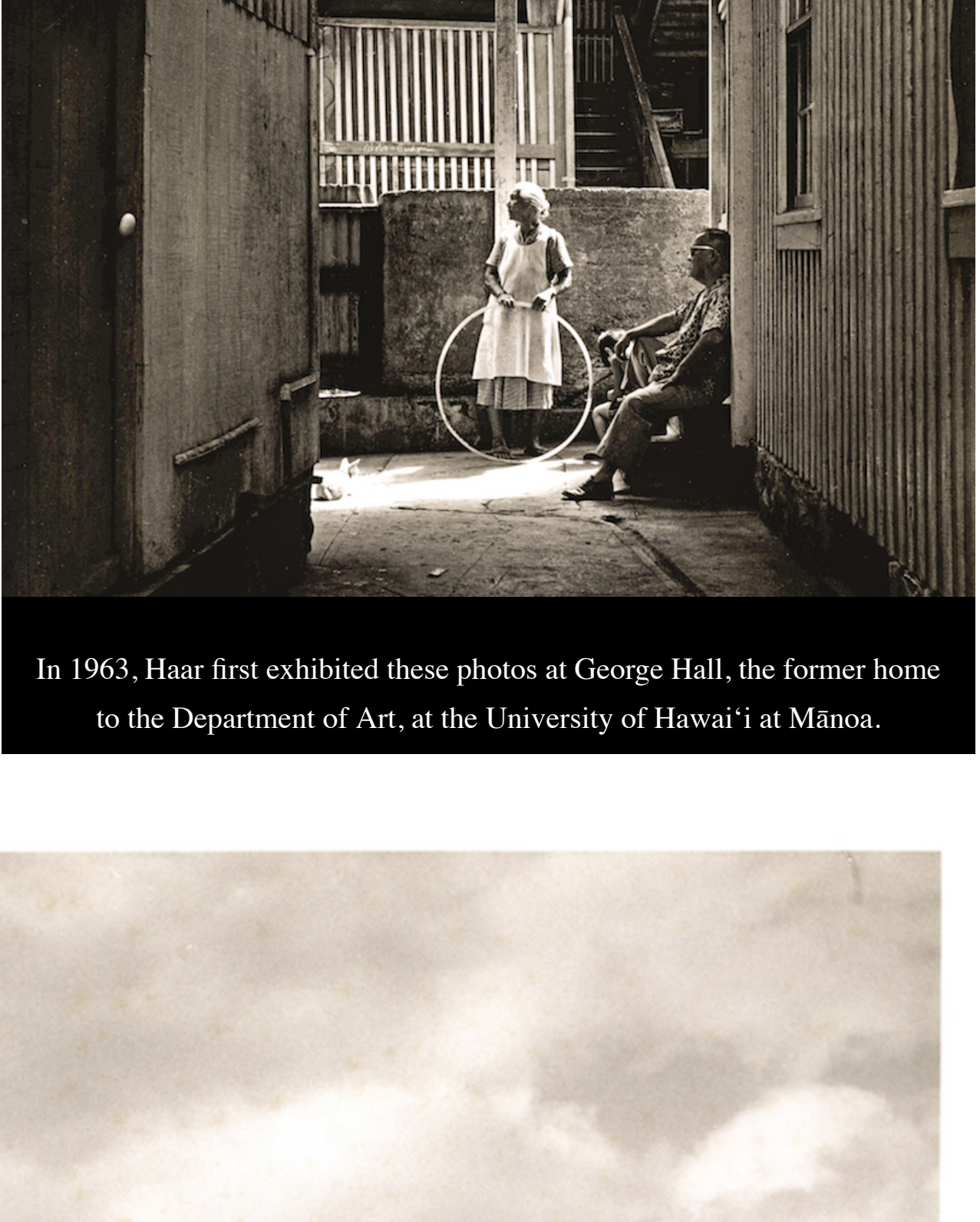


Haar's body of work offers a rare glimpse into the street life and architecture of historic Honolulu.

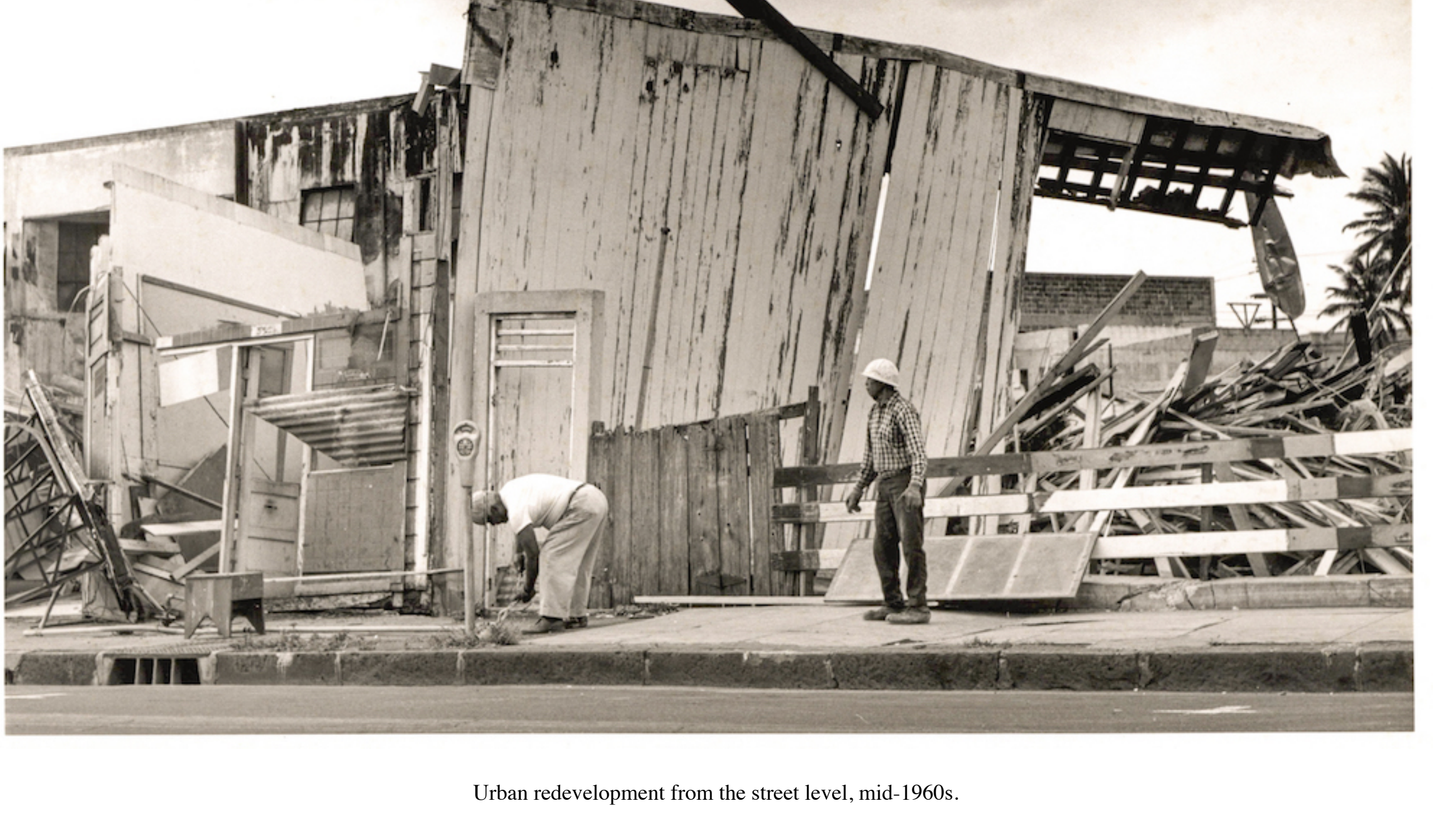
The region evolved as U.S. military personnel frequented the area, demanding bars, billiard rooms, and brothels. After the war, some Chinese and Japanese residents left, and single plantation workers, often Filipino men, came to hang out. By the 1950s, ʻAʻala and neighboring Chinatown were densely populated, multi-cultural residential and commercial neighborhoods. Then, in the '60s, the Honolulu Redevelopment Agency used federal grants to clear more than 150 acres between School and King streets. Most of ʻAʻala and parts of Chinatown were condemned as slums with their decaying single-occupancy apartments and makeshift homes, many of which had been built before plumbing and fire codes.

It won't be long before the last people who grew up shopping or living in the old ʻAʻala will be gone, along with their memories of this time and place. While Waikīkī's fancy hotels and idyllic beaches are featured on postcards of the era, Haar aimed his camera at unconventional details, capturing what Hawaiʻi was like for many hard-working locals. We often think of our cement city as an immutable monolith, but its layered history runs the risk of being forgotten without photographers like Haar.

Though he focused on the architectural character of the city's buildings, Haar gave special attention to the people inhabiting them.

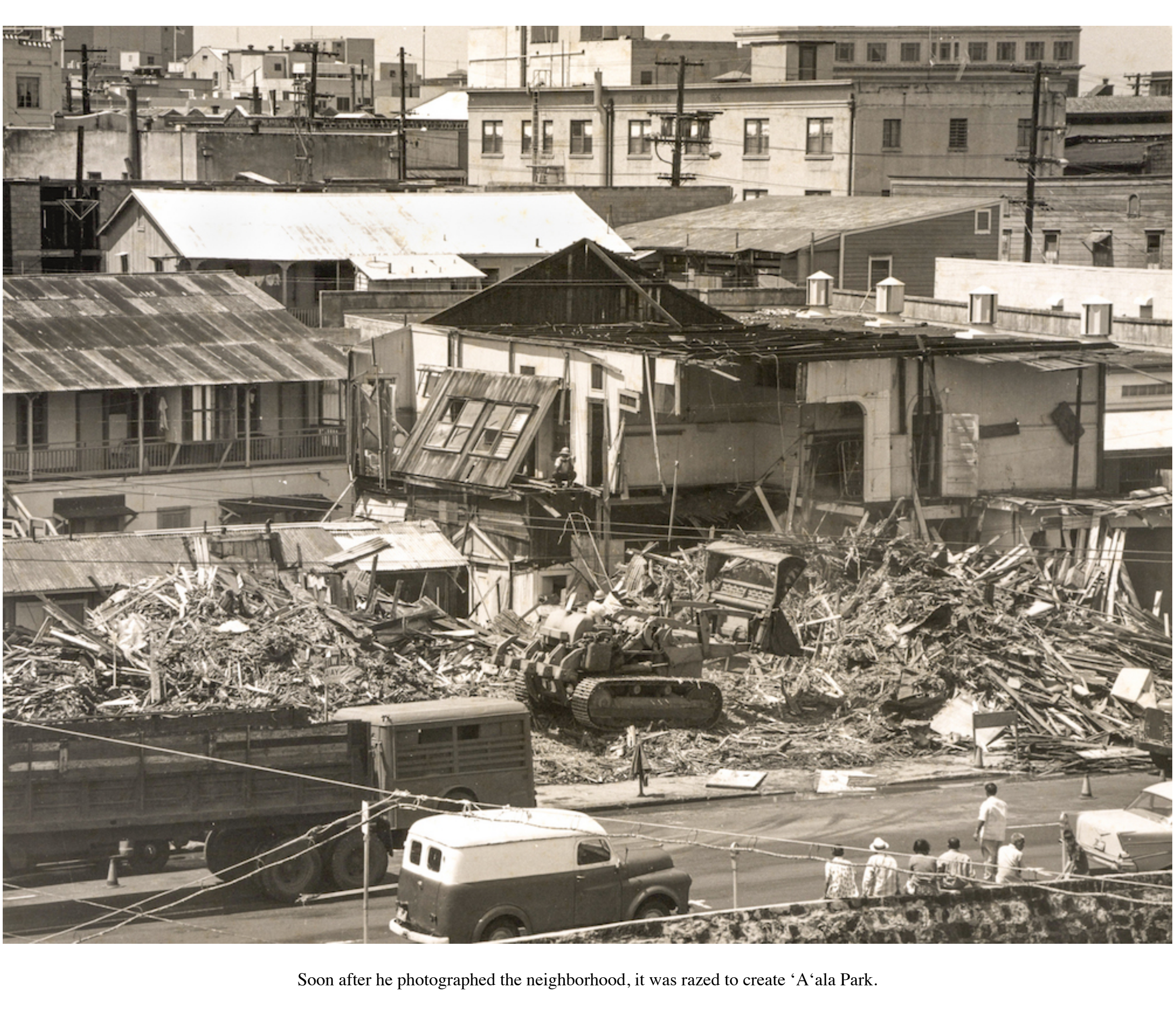


In 1963, Haar first exhibited these photos at George Hall, the former home to the Department of Art, at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa.



Urban redevelopment from the street level, mid-1960s.

On his own initiative, Haar set out to document what would become a period of transition for the community.



Soon after he photographed the neighborhood, it was razed to create ʻAʻala Park.

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